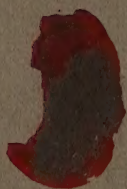
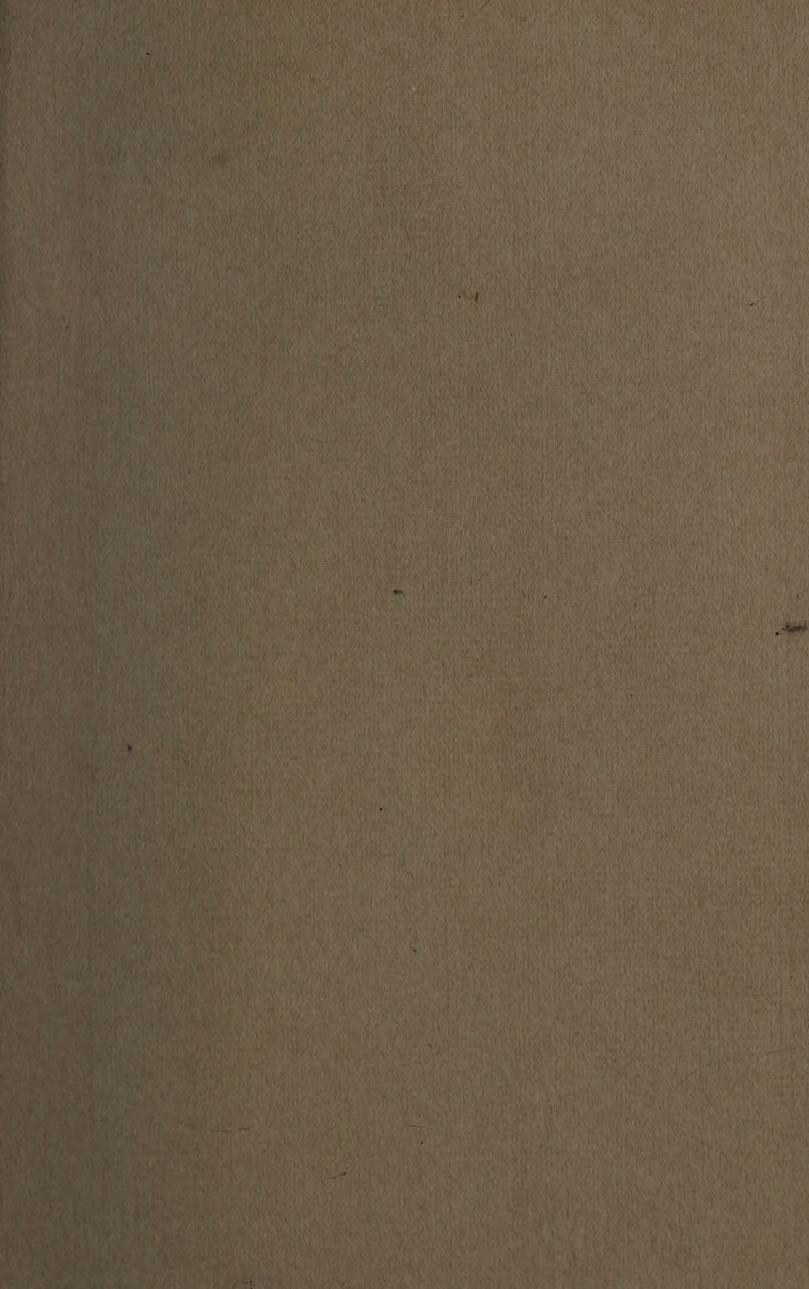


THE KIRK AND  
ITS WORTHIES  
by Nicholas Dickson













THE KIRK & ITS WORTHIES

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H. J. Cook







THE ORDINATION OF ELDERS

By J. H. Lorimer, R.S.A.





# THE KIRK & ITS WORTHIES

BY NICHOLAS DICKSON

EDITED BY D. MACLEOD MALLOCH

T. N. FOULIS  
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SOME TWENTY YEARS AGO, OR MORE, four small books were written by Mr. Nicholas Dickson, entitled respectively *The Minister*, *The Precentor*, *The Elder at the Plate*, and *The Kirk Beadle*. These books appealed to a large section of the public, and enjoyed a considerable popularity. Subsequently they were issued in two volumes, one of which dealt with *The Minister and The Precentor*. The other treated of *The Elder and The Beadle*. In this form the books again met with great appreciation. As a considerable time has elapsed since the date of this edition, and as the books contained much material and many good stories of interest to present-day readers, it has been considered advisable to prepare the present edition, which is a condensation of the material in the four original volumes with a large amount of new material added. The book in its present form begins with an entirely new chapter on "The Auld Scottish Sabbath." The concluding chapter on "The Kirk of the Present Day" is also entirely new. Both of these chapters are the work of the Editor. Besides these chapters a large number of new stories have been added to the body of the book. In this way an effort has been made to bring the present edition into harmony with present-day tastes without in any degree sacrificing portions of the original volumes, which are still of interest and value. Besides all this, the present edition is illustrated much more amply and artistically than the former editions. It is therefore hoped that this book will now appeal to all Scotsmen who are interested in the life

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

of the Church in Scotland, whether they belong to The Auld Kirk itself, or to any of the Churches which have, for conscience' sake, left the parent body. This volume is replete with stories, interesting, pathetic, and humorous; and contains also many interesting facts regarding the development of the Church in Scotland. It should, therefore, appeal not only to the clergy and laity connected with our Scottish Churches, but also to Scots across the seas, and to all English-speaking men and women who can appreciate graphic pictures of Church life, drawn in stories redolent of that dry, pawky Scots humour which is one of the predominant characteristics of the Scots Nation.

D. MACLEOD MALLOCH.

RAGUEL, PAISLEY,  
*October 1912.*

CHAPTER ONE  
ON THE AULD SCOTTISH SABBATH



# THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

## CHAPTER ONE ON THE AULD SCOTTISH SABBATH

WE SCOTS ARE A SERIOUS PEOPLE. Nevertheless our manners and customs are no longer marked by the solemn austerity which was their most prominent characteristic in the days of our forefathers. The Scottish Sabbath is still a thing of dule and woe to an Englishman : but it is now a joyous festival compared with what it was a century or two ago. Even within comparatively recent times Sabbath Observance in Scotland was fairly rigorous ; and persons now only in middle age may stand aghast at the change in the attitude of the people towards the Sabbath, compared with what it was, say, even thirty years ago. Whether the change is altogether beneficial to the health of the nation is a matter open to some argument. The Church undeniably has lost much of its grip upon the people. Our city streets and country roads are traversed by a generation which now looks upon Sunday literally as a day of rest, but pays small regard to the religious observances of the day. All this is reaction, caused by the excessive severity and austerity of bygone generations. " Be not righteous overmuch," say the scriptures. Had that advice been taken to heart by our ancestors Scotland to-day might not be forced to lament the falling off in church attendance, and the increasing desecration of the Sabbath.

But the Scot, and especially the rural Scot, has al-

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ways been a dour man. Therefore in bygone times he liked a dour religion. The joyous passages of the scriptures had little appeal to him. He who dwelt in town pondered much upon the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. While the tiller of the land lived laborious days, striving to wring from a reluctant and harsh soil a living which, at the best, was scanty. To such a man—one who had to rise early and retire late, to strive against poverty, climate, and a host of the ills which beset the farmer—life must have been a dreary round of unceasing toil. During the week he probably saw few of his fellow-men. He was much alone with nature; and with nature in stern aspect. Small wonder then that many Scotsmen of the country districts looked upon the religious exercises of the week-end, and upon the “assembling of themselves together,” as a form of relaxation. Probably they would have been the last to admit that their pleasure in the Sabbath was in any respect other than devotional. Their religion was one of gloom, practised with an eye to “the wrath to come.” Anything savouring of frivolity was *anathema*. Thus one reads of a man who strongly objected to dancing; and who, when it was pointed out to him that David danced before the Ark, solemnly remarked that he “didna think ony the mair o’ him for it.” This was a characteristic attitude, and representative of the religionaires of the covenanting type. But one cannot help surmising that their delight in the Sabbath arose from a variety of causes, some of them not wholly religious. Doubtless in the first place

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pure religion was at the root of the matter. But the man of lonely life welcomed the communion with his fellows which took place in the kirk and the kirkyard. Likewise he relished the intellectual stimulus of a good sermon from one who was possibly the only man of education in the parish. Also he rather liked to lord it over his own family flock on the Sabbath, and derived a solemn pleasure from conducting the family exercises. But, as has been said, he would have been loath to admit that pleasure entered into the matter at all. Certainly his family usually derived little pleasure from the observances of the weekend. Many a rebellious young Scot was present in the kirk for five or six hours on the Sunday, went without a hot dinner on the same dreary day, spent wearisome hours in learning passages of Scripture; or undergoing religious instruction from the head of the house; and finally, after a further dose of family prayers, retired to rest much more disposed to thank God that the Sabbath was over than to pray for the coming of another. But to the minister the Sabbath was a delight. For the elder it brought brief authority, and therefore had its joys. The precentor revelled in the opportunity it afforded for the display of his vocal charms. The beadle basked in the reflected glory of his minister. But to the laity, other than heads of households, the Sabbath meant much weariness, and unquestionably a deal of hypocrisy. Two Highland farmers met in the kirkyard after service. "Dougal," said one, "if this werena the Sabbath day what wad ye be askin' for that black coo o' yours?"

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

"'Deed, Tonal," was the reply, "if it hadna been the Lord's Day I wad hae been wantin' twelve pounds for thon coo." A good deal of this sort of thing went on, and perhaps it was not very harmful. At least it was better than the sour spirit manifested by a "Man" of Ross-shire. Some one on a Sunday was bold enough to venture the statement that it was a fine day. The "Man" eyed him with cold condemnation in his gaze. "This," he observed, "is no' a day to be speakin' about days."

The attitude of the Spiritual Rulers of the people towards Sabbath-breakers in those bygone days is well hit off by a discerning versifier in the skit entitled *The Cameronian Cat*. That unhappy animal erred too deeply for forgiveness, and the first verse of the poem tells why.

There was a Cameronian cat  
A-seeking for its prey,  
Went ben the hoose, an' caught a moose  
Upon the Sabbath day.

In those days nothing could have been more criminal. No example could have been more deplorable. This unhappy cat—unable to stifle, for even one day out of seven, its natural longings for food and sport—was an offence to the religious sense of the community. The toleration of such conduct might possibly have caused some unregenerate person to take a bath upon the Sabbath; or, even worse, to satisfy his carnal appetites by eating a hot dinner. Therefore it would have been easy to forecast the fate of that cat, once its deed of darkness was known. One is, then, not surprised to learn that:—

## ON THE AULD SCOTTISH SABBATH

The Elders they were horrified,  
An' they were vexed sair.  
Sae straicht they took that wicked cat  
Before the meenistair.

Naturally the good man was hurt to the quick. Here truly was a perilous ensample to the flock. In such a case one must be "zealous unto slaying," lest further folly should be wrought in Israel. Listen to the voice of indignant justice.

The meenistair was sairly grieved,  
An' much displeased did say,  
"O bad, perverted pussy cat  
Tae break the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath's been, frae days o' yore,  
An IN—STI—TU—TI—ON.  
Sae straichtway tak' this wicked cat  
Tae EX—E—CU—TI—ON."

The above is perhaps the most popular of the several versions of this feline tragedy ; and, though written in a scoffing spirit, it is yet fairly illustrative of the old Scottish attitude towards the observance of Sunday. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Church of Scotland possessed considerable powers over evil-doers, and was not slow to exercise them. The man who failed to attend church, and to cause his household to do likewise, speedily found himself in conflict with a power before which he must bow. His fate served as a warning to the light-minded. Hence church-going was universal ; but, in a good many cases, hypocritical.

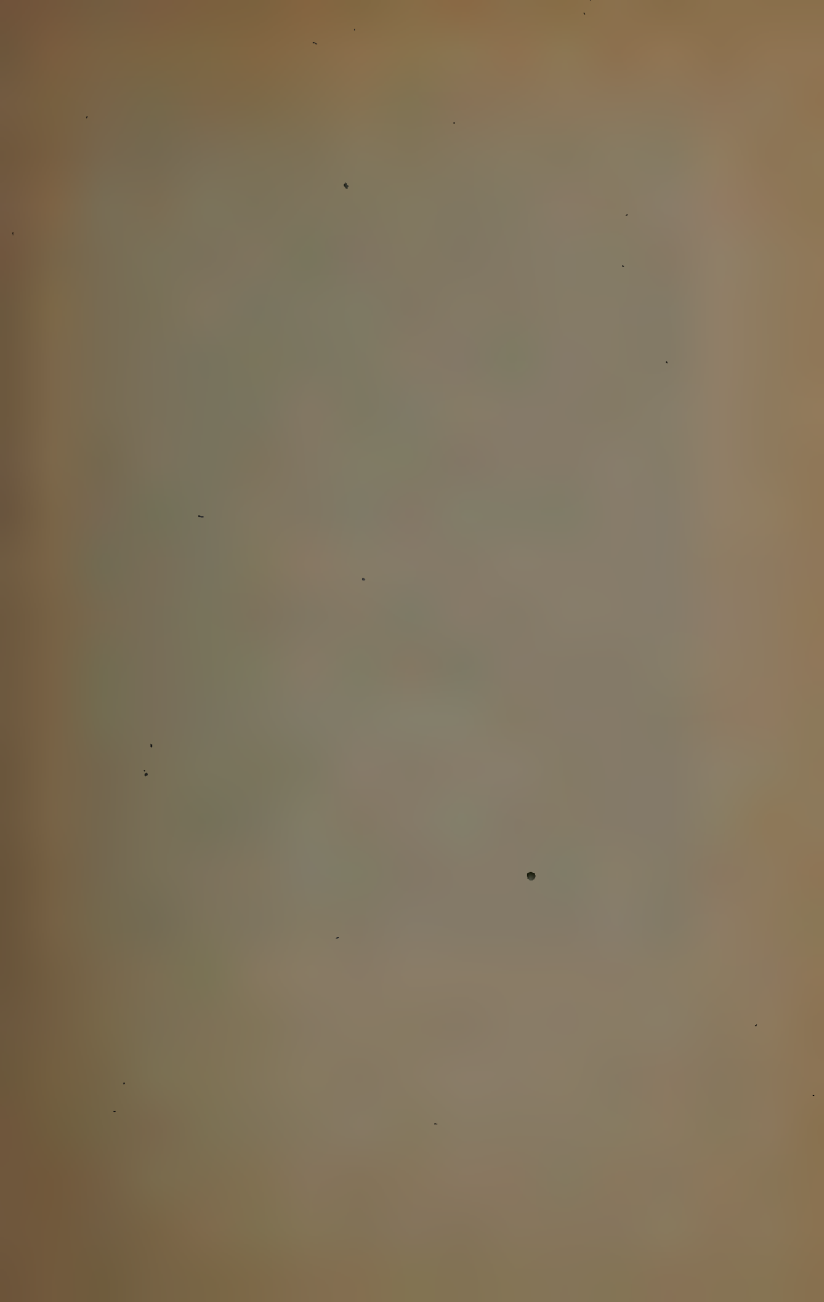
In the Western Highlands even to this day the Sabbath is kept with rigour. Not long ago, in the

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

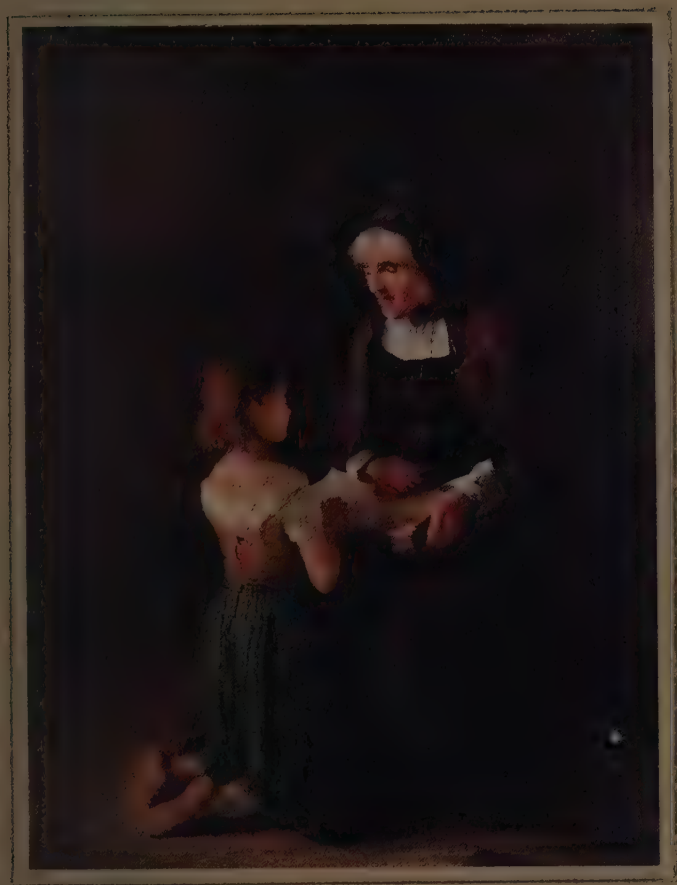
north end of Arran, a visitor seated by the roadside one Sunday evening began to whistle softly to himself the well-known psalm tune *Invocation*. He got through one verse safely; but as he began the second an indignant native emerged from a cottage near hand, and, regarding the whistler sourly, remarked, "We dinna whistle here on the Sabbath." Apparently the prohibition extended to sacred music.

A few years ago a large steam yacht anchored for the week-end in Upper Loch Torridon. The party on board spent the Sabbath in boat racing, fishing, and other ways which spelt profanation to the natives. No open protest was made on the Sunday. On Monday morning the yacht weighed anchor and sailed down the loch, which at one point narrows to such an extent that a vessel sailing through the narrows is within a stone's throw of the shore on either side. When this offending vessel, bearing the Sons of Belial, reached the spot, she was assailed with stones by the outraged Highlanders, and considerable damage was done.

These incidents show that the old spirit is alive at this day in the West and North Highlands. But, to revert to ancient History, a case can be quoted of a West Highlander being charged with committing a heinous offence on the Sabbath. The culprit was Katrine M'Muller; and she was charged *with grinding snuff on the Sabbath*. In Hewison's *Old Bute* it is chronicled that "she flatly denied it; there being no witness to prove it, she was dismissed for this; but in respect she was a stranger from Lorn, she was desir-







PENEYR

By G. V. Chalmers, R.S.A.



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ed to produce a testimonial. She told she had none ; therefore she was enjoined to get one ere Candlemas, otherwise to leave the Parish."

But, in this matter of profanation of the Sabbath, guilt was occasionally found where one would least expect it. Thus the Minister of New Machar was libelled before his Presbytery for powdering his wig on the Sabbath. From which the light-minded might conclude that the said Presbytery must have been sadly at a loss for something to do ; and must also have suffered from a strange lack of humour.

From an instance such as this last it is obvious that the Sabbath was a really serious matter in Scotland up till a comparatively recent time. The people no doubt in some cases "heard the Word gladly." But whether they did or not, they were compelled to attend the kirk. If they failed in this solemn duty, then they were liable to all manner of pains and penalties. Even if they attended church yet were they not free from interference thereafter. The rest of the day must still be spent in becoming gloom. Thus one finds in *The King's Pious Proclamation*, 1727, p. 79, the following minute of the Kirk-session of Edinburgh :—

"Taking into consideration that the Lord's Day is profaned by people standing in the streets, vaguing in the fields and gardens, as also by idly gazing out at windows, and children and apprentices playing in the streets, warn parents and threaten to refer to the Civil Magistrates for punishment, also order each Session to take its turn in watching the streets on Sabbath, as has been the laudable custom of this city, and to visit each suspected house in each parish

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by elders and deacons, with beadle and officers, and after sermon, when the day is long, to pass through the streets and reprove such as transgress, and inform on such as do not refrain."

It is interesting to contemplate what would be the effect, at the present day, of a progress of a kirk-session along Princes Street, Edinburgh, or along Great Western or Victoria Roads, Glasgow, on the Sabbath afternoon, with a view to reproving "such as transgress." But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the inhabitants of Scotland were under the Presbyterian thumb, and were compelled to be at least ostensibly religious, whether they liked it or not. In point of fact a considerable section of the nation must have liked it; for it is difficult to imagine that the dour independence of the native Scot would have submitted to what, to modern ideas, seems an intolerable domination, unless the said Scot was satisfied that he was getting something for nothing. Religion in those days was cheap. The humble bawbee, and the still humbler farthing, were accepted at the plate. The church-goer was not troubled with pew rents, for the very good reason that in many churches there were no pews unless in the gallery. The zealous seeker-after-truth either stood throughout the service; or, if he was lucky, leaned against a pillar. If he was luxurious he brought a cutty-stool. The church-goer of those days was not always "a perfectly peaceful person." He thought it no sin to secure for himself a desirable position in the body of the church *vi et armis*. One reads occasionally of "cracked sconces"

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and "bluidy nebs" being observed in the House of Prayer; and when such little pleasantries were being distributed the possessor of a cutty-stool might either use it as a weapon of offence; or, if not directly concerned in the strife, stand upon it to get a better view of the conflict. These were the good old days. The hum-drum monotony which prevails in many of our country churches to-day is no longer broken by such pleasing demonstrations of the manly spirit of the people; and nothing of a war-like nature is to be witnessed, unless, in remote districts, an occasional dog-fight between the irreligious colliers of devout shepherds.

It will be readily understood that the evil and back-sliding members of the community did not appreciate the supervision to which they were subjected by the minister and the kirk-session, and many and various were the excuses put forward to account for absence from the kirk. Thus we read of one minister scolding the ladies of his congregation for the irregularity of their attendance at church. "But," said he, "some of you will make an excuse that ye maun stay at hame an' mak' the kale. To that I answer, 'Mak' them on Saturday.' 'Aye but,' say ye, 'the kale winna keep. They'll be sour gin Sunday.' My reply to that is, 'Put ye neither sybos nor leeks in them and I'll warrant them.'" From this thoughtful admonition one gathers that the reverend monitor would have been as much at home in the kitchen as in the pulpit.

One can discover in ancient records that malin-

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gering was extensively practised. Indeed it would almost appear as if there were carnally-minded Scots, and equally carnally-minded Scots Chirurgeons who conspired together, the latter to let blood, and the former to suffer the letting, in order that the time which should have been devoted to church-going might be employed in the drinking of ale, and the exercise of other vicious propensities.

In searching through the records of olden times, one is forced to the conclusion that the Presbyterians altogether misinterpreted the well-known text "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The ideal Sabbath of the minister and the kirk-session was a day of profound mental gloom.

For the guidance of all properly disposed persons the Rev. John Willison of Dundee, who had a great reputation about the middle of the eighteenth century, recommended the following books as suitable for Sabbath reading:—Doolittle's *Call to Delaying Sinners*, Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, Allein's *Alarm*, Pearse's *Preparation for Death*, Guthrie's *Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ*, Beard's *Theatre of God's Judgements*. Mr. Willison was of opinion that these were the "most searching and heart-warming pieces to be found in any human writing." Further, he was of opinion that "all worldly thoughts as well as works are to be dismissed." He further writes as follows:—"God has appointed graciously a variety of exercises on the Sabbath day, that when we are weary of one, another may be our recreation. Are you weary of hearing? then recreate yourself

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with prayer. If of that, recreate yourself with singing God's praises. If of that, recreate yourself with meditating. If you weary of that, recreate yourself with Christian conference, repeating sermons, instructing your families. . . . If you weary of public duties, then go to private ; if of these, go to secret duties." It was a cardinal point that the mind must not be allowed to dwell upon any other than religious subjects. The body must be kept in subjection by being deprived of the usual meals. It has already been seen that the unhappy citizens of Edinburgh were kept under the eye of the Kirk ; but Edinburgh did not stand alone in this respect. One reads in the Falkirk Records that the people of Falkirk were warned that " the elders will visit families on Sunday as they think fit, and in caice they are refused access the civil Magistrates concurrence will be given to make patent doors." It would be natural to suppose that the citizens might object to this ; but it is recorded that the people supported the session ; and even went the length of spying upon their neighbours, and reporting their misdeeds to the session.

The domination of the Church seems to have been at its highest about the middle of the eighteenth century. Writing of that time, the Rev. Henry Grey Graham, in his most interesting book *Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, says of the elders and deacons, " There was not a place where one was free from their inquisitorial intrusion. They might enter any house, and even pry into the rooms. In towns where the patrol of elders or deacons, beadle

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and officers, paced with solemnity the deserted causeway eagerly eyeing every door and window, craning their necks up every close and lane, the people slunk into the obscurity of shadows and kept hushed silence. So still, so empty, were the streets on a Sunday night that no lamps were lighted, for no passengers passed by, or if they did they had no right to walk." In country districts the session kept its eye upon the besetting sins of the people according to their occupation. Thus care was taken that the farmer should not feed his cattle, except within certain appointed hours. The women of the fishing villages might not gather dulse ; neither might the men spread nets, nor set out for the fishing before twelve o'clock on Sunday night. People were punished for carrying water, for cutting kale, or for cleaning out byres and stables. It was likewise an offence to serve a hot meal in the middle of the Sabbath day. One reads of a traveller who arrived at Kirkcudbright on Saturday night. He somewhat quaintly remarks that the inn was good, but that his bedroom had not been cleaned for a hundred years. This unhappy wayfarer must have been an Englishman, because on the Sunday he had the temerity to demand dinner. The landlord in reply to his request informed his guest that he never cooked a dinner on Sunday, and that the guest must either be satisfied with bread and butter and an egg, or fast till after the evening service, when there was always a hot supper.

This custom of a hot meal in the evening appears to have been general in Scotland in the days of our

## ON THE AULD SCOTTISH SABBATH

forefathers. No doubt it was highly appreciated. For the preparations for the Sabbath had to begin on Saturday night in order that the countenances of the faithful might be suitably lugubrious by the time the church bell rang on Sunday morning. Yet let it not be supposed that this refers to the ringing of the bell for service. The services did not begin till nine or ten o'clock ; but, in order that the people should be without excuse for any lateness, the church bell gave a preliminary ring at six o'clock on Sabbath morning. In most better-class Presbyterian houses all carnal literature—which really meant everything of any ordinary interest—was carefully put out of sight at six o'clock on Saturday night. The family then proceeded to do their best to assume that funereal frame of mind which alone was considered appropriate to the blessed Sabbath. In humbler houses the guidman had to take himself in hand on Saturday evening, and remove the week's growth of stubble from his chin. While he was doing this, to an accompaniment of sighs and groans, his wife was laying out his "Sunday Blacks." It may be as well to mention that the particular sighs and groans referred to were not the outcome of religious fervour, but rather were produced by the contact of a more or less blunt razor with a set of almost porcine bristles. The guidman might not, of course, use such expressions as would relieve the feelings of a modern Scot in like circumstances. No doubt he quoted condemnatory remarks from the Psalms of David and the ancient prophets. He might also find some consolation in the fact that

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

the patriarch Job was compelled to scrape himself with a piece of broken potsherd, beside which even a blunt razor must be esteemed a luxury. Still, whatever the guidman's reflections were, the process of cleaning-up had at length an end; and he then, after the style of an Indian brave donning his war-paint, assumed his "Sunday Blacks." The guidwife thereafter appeared upon the scene, and tied his necktie for him. Having satisfied the wifely eye he was next solemnly installed in the arm-chair by the fireside, with the family Bible on his knee; and thenceforward, until the time of retiring to rest on Sunday night, his mind was set on higher things.

To the modern mind this state of matters appears depressing to a degree. We have progressed a long way since those days, and it is no longer considered incompatible with proper religious feeling to discuss ordinary matters on the Sunday, or to read books which are not wholly religious. The length to which some of the professedly religious in the eighteenth century carried their zeal was simply astounding and can only be accounted for by a terror of the wrath to come. Hell-fire and his Satanic Majesty were kept very prominently before the congregations. Cheerful doctrines such as predestination, and the damnation of unbaptized children, was zealously insisted on. With such pleasing foundations for their beliefs, and with the constant figure before them of a revengeful God, it is little wonder that, not only was the religion of the people gloomy, but that they, or some of them, sought salvation with earnestness. A person who is

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really convinced of the truth of the doctrine of eternal punishment has certainly every inducement to endeavour to escape from such a fate ; but the ordinary plain man finds it difficult to understand how our forefathers managed to reconcile such a text as “God is love” with the doctrine of eternal punishment by fire. However, the fact remains that many of the people of the eighteenth, and the early part of the nineteenth, century were deeply imbued with a religion of a profoundly gloomy type, and appeared to find some satisfaction in it. Such a man apparently was Mr. George Brown, a merchant of Glasgow, whose diary, covering the years 1745 to 1753, was privately printed. Here is his account of one Sunday. “Sabbath day, November 3rd. Rose a little after seven in the morning, fair, wind east, then prayed, and then joined in family worship, and then read the second chapter of Job. When I arose I found my heart very much out of order for the duties of the Sabbath—. . . I went to God by prayer, and under great confusion made known my conduct to Him . . . went to North-west Church and heard Mr. M'Laurin lecture and preach. In the interval of public worship I reflected on what I had been hearing, and wrote down some heads of the sermon. Went to church in the afternoon ; heard sermon on same text as forenoon ; returned and thought over the sermon till five o'clock at night ; then joined in family worship ; then supped and retired, and thought again over the sermon, and wrote down the heads of it. Then I called on the Lord by prayer, and rose and went and joined

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in family worship again. Then I retired again, and read the second chapter of Romans over several times. I concluded the Sabbath with humble confession of sin, and thankfulness to God for actions of the Sabbath . . . then I committed my soul and all my concerns to God, and went to bed at twelve o'clock at night."

This extract is doubtless eminently pleasing as showing the thoroughness of a professing Christian of the eighteenth century; but there is little doubt that the prospect of "an eternal Sabbath day," as held out to us by the Hymnologists, possesses small attraction for the modern mind if Mr. Brown's Sabbath day is to be accepted as a fair sample. Without wishing to be in any way ribald, or to offend any person's religious susceptibilities, one may say that the doctrine and theories of our ancestors of the eighteenth century were the reverse of cheerful, and wholly unattractive to the present generation. Religious thought has progressed a long way since then. Innovations have been introduced which would have shocked our forebears. The minister reads his sermon. The elder is merely one of ourselves. The precentor has vanished. The "kist o' whistles" is in every church. The leading members of the choir are usually paid. The minister's man has also practically disappeared, and the douce church officer reigns in his stead.

Again, the long sermon is a thing of the past. Modern congregations submit unwillingly to half an hour's discourse; and would rebel openly at the sermon of three-quarters of an hour. Since the day of

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Principal John Caird no Scottish preacher (unless possibly Dr. Hunter) is listened to willingly for more than half an hour. Probably the result is beneficial. When the minister was not allowed to read his sermon, but at the same time was expected to preach for perhaps two hours, his discourse must often have been exceedingly weak. In fact, extempore preaching frequently led to ludicrous mistakes which could not have occurred if the minister had had a manuscript before him. Thus one minister observed that Eutychus fell from the third loft and was killed ; and that this would no doubt be a warning to him not to sleep in church again. While another worthy cleric, discoursing upon the return of the Prodigal Son, remarked that he had no doubt that the father had kept the fatted calf for many years on the chance of the son's return. Such mistakes are unlikely if the minister has a manuscript in front of him ; and, further, there is little doubt that a carefully prepared sermon, even if read, is better worth listening to than the chance thought which may arise to the surface of a possibly commonplace mind. Geniuses are as rare in the pulpit as in other walks of life.

In conclusion there appears to be little to regret in the passing away of the old style of compulsory Sabbath observances. It is unfortunately true that at the present time the Church appears to have lost something of its grip upon the life of the nation. For this there may be many reasons ; and not the least of them is that the standard of education among the people is higher than it used to be, whereas the class

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of men going into the ministry is not so good as of yore. The modern man of trained intelligence is not prepared to accept mouldy theories from men who are often both socially and mentally his inferiors. In considering the state of religion in Scotland at the present moment, one is forced to conclude that the harvest truly is plenteous, but that labourers of the proper kind are very few indeed. Apart altogether from the belief of any particular sect, the decay of Church influence is to be deplored. "Righteousness exalteth a Nation," no matter whether that righteousness be Presbyterian or Episcopalian. Therefore, "Let a man examine himself," and lead a righteous life according to the best ideal which he can set up. Then he may safely say, in the words of an American poet:—

I will lead a righteous life, righteous life, righteous life,  
I will lead a righteous life gin I bust.  
Then when Angel Gabriel's trump shall set sinners on the  
jump,  
I'll await the final dump full o' trust.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE AULD SCOTS MINISTER IN EMBRYO



## CHAPTER TWO THE AULD SCOTS MINISTER IN EMBRYO

LONG AGO THERE WERE FEW PARENTS in Scotland who did not cherish, in their heart of hearts, the wish that one of their sons might be consecrated to the service of the Church. The same wish is, no doubt, cherished still, but it does not seem to be so frequently expressed as it was forty or fifty years ago. In those days the usual question asked of a boy was not, "What is your name?" but "What are you going to be?" Out of every family it was expected that at least one boy would reply that he wished to be a minister. "He was set apart for the Church," says Barrie in *The Little Minister*, "as doggedly as the shilling a week for the rent; and the rule held good though the family consisted of only one boy."

In *Guy Mannering*, Sir Walter Scott gives another instance of early wishes for the ministry in the case of Abel Sampson, commonly called, from his future occupation, Dominie Sampson. Having evinced from his very cradle an uncommon seriousness of disposition, his parents were encouraged to hope "that their bairn might wag his pow in a pulpit yet." Accordingly, with a view to such a consummation, "they pinched and pared, rose early and lay down late, ate dry bread and drank cold water, to secure to Abel the means of learning."

As the boy who had thus been consecrated to the Church gradually unfolded his character and developed the grace that was fondly believed to be in

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him, every peculiarity was carefully watched and noted by his anxious and admiring parents. The less he was like other boys the more was he considered to be suited for the pulpit. When the celebrated Dr. George Lawson of Selkirk was a little fellow, it was quite evident, says his biographer, Dr. John Macfarlane, that he was "out of the ordinary." The boy's thirst for knowledge was intense, while his desire for work on his father's farm was the reverse. He was sent, on one occasion, to a mill in charge of a horse which carried a sackful of grain to be ground into meal for the family use. Thinking that the horse was at one end of the halter, like every orthodox animal in similar circumstances, the boy proceeded on his way to the mill absorbed in thought or reading a book. The horse, apparently an observer of human nature and a humorist in his way, seeing the boy otherwise engaged than in attending to duty, slipped the halter, took to grazing by the wayside, and allowed the future minister to go forward to the mill alone.

Judging from this incident that the boy was not destined for farm work, but for the Church, the parents took him to their minister, the Rev. Mr. Mair, in order to be guided and strengthened by the advice which they expected to get from him. Mr. Mair listened attentively to the views and proposals stated by Mr. and Mrs. Lawson. During the interview the boy had withdrawn to a window recess, and was there employed in writing with his finger on one of the panes—probably noting the heads of his first sermon. But whatever he was engaged in doing, he







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was awakened out of his indifference to the presence of the family minister by hearing that worthy saying, in angry tones, "I tell thee, Mr. Lawson, he has no mother wit. If a man wants lair he may get that ; if he wants riches he may get them ; and even if he wants grace he may get it. But if a man wants commonsense, I tell thee, he will never get that."

This was surely not a very promising outlook for George Lawson and the pulpit in which his parents had hoped one day to see him wag his pow. It is but right, however, to add, for the sake of all parties concerned, that ere long the boy began to show so much precocity and promise that Mr. Mair took every opportunity of helping him forward in his education and preparation for the ministry.

In the next story it is not the minister who is consulted about a boy, but the schoolmaster. Dr. Guthrie, in his *Autobiography*, relates that one day a countryman called on Mr. Linton, headmaster of the Brechin Grammar School, and asked advice with reference to the professional outlook of a youth accompanying him. "Mr. Linton, ye see my laddie's fond o' lair, and I should like to gie him a gude eddication."

"And what would you like to make of him?" asked the master.

"Oh, if he gets grace we'll make him a minister."

"And what if he gets no grace?"

"Weel, in that case, we'll just make him a dominee."

The author of *Ministers and Men in the Far North* tells that the subject of one of his sketches, the Rev.

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Alexander Gunn, in very early youth gave indications of tastes and likings far above those which usually characterise boys. On one occasion Alexander was sent to the hill pasture to tend some cattle feeding on the common there. When evening came he returned, bringing with him cattle indeed, but few of them belonging to his father. Knowing the hasty temper of the old man, the farm servants expected to see the boy severely reproved or punished for his carelessness. The farmer, however, only quietly remarked, "I suppose the Lord has other work for the boy than minding my cattle."

Some of these embryo ministers were as fond of fun and frolic as were those companions who had chosen the law, the army, the navy, or any of the other professions. In his *Two Centuries of Border Church-Life*, Mr. Tait narrates that Dr. Waugh, when a boy, was regarded as the most active and energetic of all his school companions. Fond of adventure, and a great lover of Nature as she is seen in the fields and on the hills, the boy used to rise early and leave home for an hour or two. On appearing at breakfast he would laughingly say, "I have been seeing foxy and hearing the linties."

Norman Macleod, while a student in the University of Glasgow, used to spend his Sundays at home in the manse of Campsie. These weekly visits frequently gave occasion for grave concern on the part of father and mother; for coming, as Norman did, in the full swing of fresh and buoyant excitement after the restraint of study, the noisy fun and ceaseless mi-

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micry in which he indulged made them afraid that the young student would not be sedate enough for the ministry.

It is interesting to turn from these incidents of parental solicitude and boyish exhibitions of character to the boy himself, for the purpose of ascertaining his own sentiments with regard to his destination for the ministry. From Dr. Hanna's *Memoirs of Dr. Chalmers* we learn that almost as soon as he could form or announce a purpose the future famous Scottish preacher declared that he would be a minister. The sister of one of his school-fellows at Anstruther remembered breaking in upon her brother and Chalmers in a room to which they had retired together. There she found Chalmers standing on a chair and preaching most vigorously to his single auditor below. Not only had he then resolved to be a minister, but he had actually fixed upon his first text, and that was, "Let brotherly love continue."

Another famous Scottish preacher, Dr. Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, took to addressing an audience while still a child—an audience larger than that which listened to Chalmers. At six years of age, Carlyle one Sunday morning found that about a dozen old women had been unable to obtain entrance into the parish church of Prestonpans, where his father was minister. To this "overflow meeting" the child actually proposed to read a portion of scripture, and the better to hear the infant teacher, the auld wives set him on a tombstone, from which he read to an audience, increased to about a score, the whole of the "Song of Solomon."

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In connection with this incident, one of the child's hearers afterwards found him playing, like any ordinary child, on a staircase. Stroking his head and carressing him, she called him a fine boy, and expressed the wish that he would not only be a minister like his father, but that he would be his father's successor in the parish of Prestonpans. "No, no," replied the child, "I'll never be a minister in that church; but yonder's my church"—pointing to the steeple of Inveresk, which could be distinctly seen from the place where the infant seer delivered this prophetic utterance.

A momentous affair was this licence to wag the paw in a pulpit! It was, and still is, of course, the outcome of much preparation on the part of the preacher, and yet more anxiety on the part of parents. One of the present writer's earliest recollections is that of his father having been called upon one Sunday morning by a neighbour whose only son had just completed his theological course. The young man had been duly licensed, and was, on the morning in question, appointed to conduct public worship for the first time. "I'm awfully nervous about his first public appearance, and his first sermon," said the anxious father. "Will you go, my friend, and tell me in the afternoon how he got on?"

The commission was cordially accepted; and when the afternoon came, the two fathers met. The suspense was soon over, for the report submitted was gratifying in the extreme. The young preacher had acquitted himself most admirably; whereupon, at the

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news, his father's excitement and gratitude found relief in tears. "I consecrated him to the service of the Church while he was yet a child," he said. "And, now that he has occupied the pulpit of his native parish at last, I feel as if life were worth the living after all."

Different were the feelings and expressions of the man in the next story when his son, and his son's fellow licentiate, occupied the pulpit for the first time. For the sake of comparison, the father attended both services, and when asked his opinion as to the respective merits of the two preachers, he replied, "He's really a nice young lad that preached in the forenoon—a nice lad, and some spunk in him. But he hasna *the waap o' the arm* that ma son has. I bred him, ye see, to be a tailor—ma ain profession. Ye should make a' students tailors first."

From the greatness of the joy of parents in hearing that their son has satisfactorily acquitted himself in the pulpit, one may form some faint idea of the grief and disappointment that are caused when he breaks down, and "sticks" in the delivery of his first discourse. And yet such a trial many an anxious parent has had to endure. Witness the case of Dominie Sampson. The Dominie's first appearance in the pulpit was also his last. His biographer describes the scene; and the description, though coloured with a little exaggeration, is graphic in the extreme.

Partly from the Dominie's own bashfulness, and partly owing to a strong and obvious disposition to risibility which pervaded the congregation upon his

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first attempt, he became totally incapable of proceeding in his intended discourse—gasped, grinned hideously, rolled his eyes till the congregation thought them flying out of his head, shut the Bible, stumbled down the pulpit stairs, trampling upon the old women who generally took their station there, and was ever afterwards designated, “*the stickit minister*.”

Few expressions have come to carry more opprobrium and disgrace than this one of “the stickit minister.” The general idea associated with it is that the young preacher who “stuck” in the pulpit is henceforth to be regarded as a cipher in society and a failure in life. There is no reason, however, for regarding the preacher in this light. Very often the failure in the pulpit prepares the way for success in some more congenial profession. There is an incident from the Border country which may, perhaps, illustrate the truth of this remark.

A divinity student nearing the end of his course of study used to wander among the green hills of his native Liddesdale during the summer vacation. When beyond the reach of every mortal ear, and standing on some hill-top where it would take at least an hour for any human being to approach within speaking distance, the young student took to practising the delivery of the sermon that was to make of him a great preacher. Every day, when alone, and standing on a hill-top, he rehearsed the carefully prepared discourse, until he had got it so thoroughly “committed” that he thought he “could manage it.”

At length the eventful Sunday came when, after

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being licensed, the preacher was engaged to conduct public worship in the church of his native parish. His father had died many years before this auspicious day, but his mother was "still to the fore," and a proud woman she was on the morning of the memorable Sunday morning when her only son was at length to wag his pow in the pulpit.

The service begun, all went well until the sermon came. The finely rounded sentences that had rolled so grandly off the young preacher's tongue on the lonely hill-tops somehow wanted to be back on the hill-tops once more, for they refused to be delivered in the little parish church. The dreaded dead-lock came. A total collapse followed; and as "the stickit minister" descended the pulpit stairs he said within himself, "It's all up for me as a preacher. My mother—oh, my mother!"

There is no use in prolonging the agony of that dreadful Sunday morning; never again did the young man enter a pulpit. But taking to politics and literature, he afterwards distinguished himself in the editorial chair of one of the most influential of Scottish provincial newspapers.

Sir David Brewster was educated for the Church. Yet, though licensed to preach, he never made a public appearance without suffering much from constitutional nervousness. At a large dinner party he was asked to say grace; and, as he proceeded to do so, the words stuck in his throat and he utterly broke down. Clearly the young licentiate was not meant to be a preacher, so he wisely betook himself to other

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studies, and ultimately made for himself a name that will always be associated with optical science and philosophical literature.

On several occasions, while speaking in public, Professor John Stuart Blackie stated that he was "a stickit minister." He did not mention the circumstances which entitled him to that negative distinction; for such it was in his case, since the genial Professor's brilliant career took away the reproach, if there be any reproach, that is apt to be associated with the failure to wag one's pow in a pulpit. There may be no philosophy to account for this failure. A little bit of human weakness at a very critical moment may produce the much-dreaded mischief. Narrating the story of his affection for Margaret, the Dominie, in Barrie's *Little Minister*, remarks that during the time he remained in her presence something came over him—a kind of dryness in the throat—that made him speechless. And then the Dominie adds, "I have known divinity students stricken in the same way just as they were giving out their first text. It is no aid in getting a kirk or wooing a woman."

After passing all his examinations and delivering his trial sermons, the divinity student is at last duly licensed by the Presbytery. His student days are over; he enters upon a period of probation, and patiently waits the development of events that may call him to occupy a distinguished place in the ecclesiastical history of his country. As the politician may aspire to the premier seat in the Cabinet, so the young Scottish preacher may carry in the lining of his sermon-

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case a possible commission to fill, by and by, the Moderator's chair in the Supreme Court of his Church.

Dr. James Brown, in his *Life of a Scottish Probationer*, gives an interesting account of the hopes and fears of the young minister waiting for the "call" that sometimes, as in Thomas Davidson's case, never comes at all. The period of probation seems to vary in almost every individual case. Thomas Guthrie waited so long that he began to give up hopes of the ministry and betake himself to banking. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, on the other hand, had no sooner obtained licence as a preacher than he received several applications from ministers who wished to secure his services as assistant. Choosing Larbert, he remained there for a year only, when he was called to St. Peter's, Dundee.

In this time of probation, suspense, and waiting for the call that may come with any post, the young preacher gets a variety of experiences that may stand him in good stead if he has any "grit" about him at all. The author of *Recollections of a Speyside Parish* relates the story of a probationer who had gone to preach one Sunday in that district. The resident minister, for whom he officiated, was uncertain whether the preacher would stay to dinner or not. He therefore had a conference with his housekeeper on the subject, and they arrived at this arrangement: if the preacher stayed, two cock-chickens were to be cooked: if he did not stay, one would do as usual. "Ye'll bide an' tak' a bite o' dinner after the kirk's out," said the minister to the preacher, in a half-hearted kind of fashion that lacked the ring of genuine hospitality.

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The preacher could not say, as he had arranged to preach at Rothies in the evening. On further consideration, however, he consented when he saw that the minister appeared to press his hospitality more warmly as the prospective guest seemed anxious to decline it. Whereupon the minister rose, walked to the passage which communicated with the kitchen, and called out to the housekeeper, "Annie, are ye there, woman? Put on the other cock. He's bidin' yet."

When a probationer acted as pulpit supply for a country minister it was the recognised practice that he was entitled to stay at the manse until the morning of the following Tuesday. This privilege was valued by impecunious probationers because it afforded them a day's free board and lodging after the labours of the Sunday. But for that very reason the custom did not commend itself to the good lady of the manse. Many were the hints, more or less delicate, which the unwished-for lodger received indicating that his room would be preferred to his company. One lady had a device which was usually effective. On the Monday morning she would come out of her room and call loudly to the servant—

"Jeanie, bile twa eggs for the minister, for the lad's gaun tae travel."

One such lady became notorious among the clergy for her parsimony, but once at least she encountered a probationer who feared her not. On the Sunday morning, when one would suppose a preacher specially needed a good breakfast, the lady inquired of her guest if he could eat an egg.

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"Yes, madam," he replied. "I always eat one when I cannot get two."

But inhospitality was only one of the trials which the probationer had to face. One ambitious young gentleman had prepared a great sermon, and eagerly waited the favour of being allowed to deliver it in the church of his native parish. The wished-for opportunity came at last. The preliminary part of the service having been disposed of, the probationer announced his text, stated his subject, warmed to his work, and wakened up the congregation as they had never been wakened up before. The pulpit in which he was declaiming so eloquently was so infirm from age that there was danger in much gesticulation, and he had previously been warned by an old laird, one of the heritors, to "ca canny." But the preacher forgot these trifles as he rose to the height of his great argument, and enforced it with consummate eloquence and skill.

Sitting in a square table seat below, the laird became more anxious about the safety of the pulpit than about the rising fame of the probationer who was thundering onward in increasing vehemence, piling his periods, and demolishing argument after argument of the adversary. Just as the preacher gathered himself up to deliver the final burst the warning voice of the auld laird rose above the tempest, and brought matters to a different culmination than the probationer had expected: "Noo, ma man, gin ye break that pu'pit ye'll pay for't."

Of a totally different character was the next cul-

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mination. A probationer had made what he considered an excellent impression in the pulpit—so excellent indeed that he fully expected high commendation. Entering the vestry at the close of the service he was met by the minister for whom he had officiated. To him the probationer modestly remarked, “No compliments, Doctor, no compliments, mind.” “Na, na,” was the dry response. “Nooadays I’m glad tae get onybody.”

Some clerical fledglings are very considerate of possible deficiencies in the divine intelligence. Thus one young minister, in his desire to make things easy for the Almighty, began his prayer thus: “Paradoxical as it may seem to Thee, O Lord——”

Experience doubtless cured faults of this nature; but in former times when prayers were expected to be of great length they proved something of a stumbling-block to the probationers.

One of these gentlemen was invited to stay at a country manse for some days before the Sunday on which he was to officiate in the church. Upon the Saturday he met a fellow-probationer, and confessed to him that he was in deep distress about the prayers for the service which he was to conduct upon the morrow. His friend expressed astonishment, and said: “What is the difficulty? For I know for certain that you have at least two very fine prayers.” “That is all very well,” was the reply. “But I need two prayers for the service; and I have already used one of them up for blessings at the manse.”

These budding sons of the church are at times prone

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to exaggeration. Oratorical effect has oftentimes more weight with them than has strict accuracy. Thus one Highland student had charge one summer of a small church on Speyside. In his opening discourse he used the failure of the City of Glasgow Bank as a warning and an example, and did not scruple to make the most of the subject. That failure was a dire calamity, and its consequences heartrending; but they were hardly as bad as this young man made out, when, in a flight of eloquence, he informed his wondering hearers that—

“Thousands died, my dear friends; and thousands became demented.”

Nervousness in the pulpit is another besetting weakness of the youthful clergy. A sad example was once set by a probationer who arrived at a country church to take the morning service, and presently found himself in a pitiable state of nerves. The bell had not yet begun to ring; so in the vestry he confided his woes to the beadle. The latter was full of sympathy, and at length, evidently considering the case one for extreme measures, he produced a bottle of brandy which was kept for emergencies, and caused the young preacher to imbibe a considerable quantity. The effect was immediate, as the youth was, generally speaking, a teetotaler. The beadle therefore proceeded to his duties of bell-ringing with an easy mind. But when this task was performed he returned to the vestry, only to find that the probationer was again seemingly upon the verge of nervous collapse. There was only one thing for it. Another dose of

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brandy was promptly administered, and presently the preacher was ushered into the pulpit. But the spirit was now taking effect. The young man gained the pulpit with difficulty, and kept his feet with greater difficulty. He opened the Psalter to give out the psalm, and found himself lost in a maze of blurred pages. For a while he fumbled with the book; but at length losing all patience, he leaned over the pulpit with a beatific but spirituous smile, and paralysed the congregation by saying in a loud voice—

“Dear friendsh, sing any blooming psalm you like.”

One shudders in contemplation of the fate of this doubtless excellent young man, thus overcome by a wile of the Devil. The value of experience is shown by the following story which narrates how an older and wiser man dealt with a similar temptation. He was to preach in a friend's church; but, mistaking the distance, ultimately had to make such haste that he arrived at the vestry exhausted, and in a profuse perspiration. The beadle was greatly concerned, and said, “You're in an awfu' state, sir. Ye canna gang into the pu'pit like that. Ye're no fit fur tae preach. But jist come awa' ben wi' me, an' I'll gie ye a glass o' whisky.”

The minister however refused. “No, no, John,” he said. “I'll no' take a glass—and that for three reasons. Firstly, I'm gaun tae preach a temperance sermon. Secondly, I'm a strict teetotaler. And, thirdly, I've had yin already.”

## CHAPTER THREE

PATRONAGE, PRAYERS, TEXTS  
AND SERMONS









THE DARNIER  
By G. Paul Chalmers, R.S.A.



## CHAPTER THREE PATRONAGE, PRAYERS & SERMONS

IN THE OLD DAYS OF CHURCH PATRONage in Scotland, the young licentiate who had any influence in the proper quarter received the presentation to a parish from the patron, and knew none of the trials of anxious probation or weary waiting. In his *Annals of the Parish* Galt gives a series of graphic pictures in the life and experience of an auld Scotch minister of his day. Perhaps the most graphic of them all is the "placing," or settlement, of the subject of his sketches—the Rev. Micah Balwhidder, minister of the parish of Dalmailing.

This placing is narrated as if described by the minister himself. "It was," says he, "a great affair. For I was put in by the patron, and the people knew nothing whatsoever of me; and their hearts were stirred into strife on the occasion, and they did all that lay within the compass of their power to keep me out; insomuch that there was obliged to be a guard of soldiers to protect the Presbytery; and it was a thing that made my heart grieve when I heard the drum beating and the fife playing as we were going to the kirk. The people were really mad and vicious, and flung dirt on us as we passed, and reviled us all, and held out the finger of scorn at me, but I endured it with a resigned spirit, compassionating their wilfulness and blindness.

"When we got to the kirk door it was found to be nailed up, so as by no possibility to be opened. The sergeant of the soldiers wanted to break it; but I was

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afraid that the heritors would grudge and complain of the expense of a new door, and I supplicated him to let it be as it was. We were, therefore, obligated to go in by a window, and the crowd followed us in the most unreverent manner, making the Lord's house like an inn on a Fair day."

After devotional exercises and the sermon usual on such occasions, the ordination service followed, when the clamour of the discontented parishioners was renewed. In the midst of it all, however, the humour that almost always crops up wherever and whenever a body of Scotchmen meet, was not wanting on the occasion. Mr. Given, the minister of Lugton, and a member of the Presbytery, was a jocose man, and would have his joke even at the solemn meeting. "When the laying of the hands upon me was a doing," continues the minister, "Mr. Given could not get near enough to put on his, but he stretched out his staff and touched my head, and said, to the great diversion of the rest, *This will do well enough—timber to timber*. But it was an unkindly saying of Mr. Given, considering the time, and the place, and temper of the people."

The presentation to a charge in unpopular circumstances does not seem to have been a very enviable lot. In the course of his parochial visitation the minister so presented had many a curt reply to some of the questions he asked in the way of family catechising. "Who made Paul a preacher?" an unpopular presentee asked of the head of a household, expecting, of course, the orthodox reply. But the reply came,

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snell and sharp, "It wasna the Duke of Queensberry at ony rate."

This "placing" or settling a minister in a country parish long ago created considerable excitement in the interested locality.

The choice was sometimes determined by the voice of the congregation instead of by the will of the patron. In a parish in Clydesdale a number of candidates had preached in a vacant congregation without any one of them making much impression. At last a young preacher appeared, of whom the beadle formed so high an opinion that he gave him this hint.

"Sir," said the beadle, "there are two nails in our pulpit, on one of which our late worthy minister used to hang his hat. None of the rest have hit on it. If you put your hat on the right nail it will please."

The hint was taken, and that candidate was chosen.

In cases where a "placed" minister was called to a new charge it was not unusual for the recipient of the call to give, as the reason for his change of sphere, that he "had received a call from the Lord," and that therefore he must obey. The fact that the emoluments in the new charge were almost invariably considerably better than in the old, had seemingly "nothing to do with the case."

A certain parish minister, having received a call to a more lucrative charge, encountered an old woman, a member of his congregation; whereupon the following conversation ensued:—

"And so ye're gaun tae leave us, Mr. ——"

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“ Ay, Betty, ay. It’s hard to go ; but I have received a call from the Lord.”

“ Deed, sir, if He had ca’ed ye tae Smapey (a poor parish in the neighbourhood) I doubt ye would never have let on ye heard Him ! ”

In another case a “ placed ” minister was called to a better-paid charge, but he announced that he would pray over the matter for a week, and then give his decision. One of the elders met the minister’s little daughter during this week of prayer, and said to her—

“ Well, Mary, what’s your father going to do about this call ? Are we going to lose him ? ”

“ Please, sir,” answered Mary, “ I don’t quite know. Father’s praying in the library. But mother’s packing.”

There were, of necessity, many disappointed ones among the probationer candidates then, as well as now. A young minister, Mr. Brown, was sent on Sunday to preach as a candidate for the chapel of Blairduff, near Aberdeen. The rain came down handsomely all morning, and the preacher got wet to the skin. On such a day there was but a poor congregation, and, consequently, the candidate’s chance of success was gone. After the service, one of the elders bestowed on him this left-handed compliment at parting, “ Guid day, then ; if ye havena gotten the kirk, ye’ve gotten the steepin’ ”.

While enforced settlements were frequently the source of much dissatisfaction in a parish, it was by no means always the case that the minister, who was elected by the voice of the congregation, entered his

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earthly paradise on the day of his ordination, and was happy ever afterwards. There are numerous cases in which the non-conforming portion of the Scottish clergy had to face what seemed only fractious opposition for the sake of opposition. After the ordination at Haddington of a young preacher, afterwards well known as Dr. John Brown, a solitary dissident called at the manse and intimated his intention to "lift his lines."

"Why do you think of leaving us?" the minister asked.

"Because I don't think you are a good preacher."

"Oh," replied Mr. Brown, "that is quite my own opinion too. The great majority of the congregation think differently, however, and it would ill become you and me to set up our individual opinions against theirs. I have given in to them; and I would suggest that you, my friend, should do the same."

"Well, well," replied the grumbler, struck by this way of putting things, "I think you're right, and I'll e'en follow your example."

The probationer of former days, having been "called" and "placed," became The Minister; not the minister of to-day, however, but *The Auld Scotch Minister* of a former day and generation, with all the simplicities about him which marked him off as one of the outstanding figures in the social life of Scotland at the close of last century and the first half of the present.

There does not seem to have been much sustained or consecutive study in the preparation of the aver-

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age sermon long ago ; but there was a great deal of common sense that perhaps made up for any other deficiency. Thus we read of one minister asking another what was considered to be the best preparation for effective work in the pulpit. The questioner himself suggested the stereotyped and orthodox preliminaries of study and prayer—whereupon the other added, “ And a good sleep.” But there seems to have been very little of any of these preliminaries in the experience of a Perth minister, whose great hobby was early rising, and the advantages to be derived from the practice. Expatiating upon these advantages the minister stated that he had one morning lately, not only written a sermon but killed a salmon.

“ Weel, sir,” said the friend who had been advised to try early rising, and who placed no great value on the discourse that had been knocked off in such a short space, “ Weel, sir, I would rather hae your salmon than your sermon.”

Still less study does one of the ministers of Penicuik seem to have indulged in when he was complimented by a friend on the trouble and the time he must have spent in the preparation of a sermon that had that morning been delivered.

“ Trouble, sir,” replied Mr. Colston, the minister referred to, and thumping with his fist a book which lay on the table. “ There lies the Bible ! I haven’t opened it for three months ! ”

Before Dr. Chalmers had experienced the change which set the ministry in a new light for him, he bestowed comparatively little time or care on his pul-

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pit preparations. On this matter a friend's letter is quoted in Dr. Hanna's Memoirs of the great preacher—"I have known him not begin them (his sermons) till Sabbath morning. He told me that he wrote in shorthand, and when he once began he kept the pen going till he had finished his discourse. . . . But they were written in a fervid strain, and delivered with energetic animation."

The methods of conducting public worship long ago were often quaint and homely. The Rev. Peter Glass flourished in Crail about the close of last century. Invariably he used the simplest terms in the pulpit both in prayer and sermon, and these were all the more acceptable to his congregation, as they were mostly composed of plain fisher-folk. One morning he prayed that the men's boats might be filled with herring "up to the very tow-holes." "Na, na, minister; nosae far as that," called out someone interested in the petition. "Man, she would sink if the herrin' filled her to the tow-holes."

Direct and simple such prayers must have been. Homely as the following illustration is, one can easily imagine how forcibly it would strike a country congregation: "Thou, O Lord," said a minister in the West of Scotland, addressing the Hearer of Prayer, "art like a mouse in a dry-stane dyke—aye keekin' oot at us frae holes an' crannies; but we canna see Thee."

Touching on matters engaging public attention at the time, a minister of the Barony Church in Glasgow prayed that the insatiable ambition of Louis XIV. of

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France might be curbed, and that the King himself might be shaken over the mouth of the bottomless pit. "But, Lord," added the minister, "dinna let him fa' in; just gi'e him a gude fricht."

If such homely illustrations and unorthodox petitions were frequently employed in the ordinary prayers of a former time, it is only natural to expect something even more noteworthy when we come among the special prayers. Asked specially to return thanks for an excellent harvest and its safe ingathering, a minister in the North of Scotland did so; but desirous of being perfectly truthful, he conscientiously added—"Safely ingathered, a' except a few fields between this and Stonehaven no' worth mentionin'."

Another minister was equally truthful, but his prayer was of somewhat different tenor. Addressing the Almighty on behalf of the agriculturists of his flock he prayed fervently that such weather might be granted as was necessary for ripening and gathering in the fruits of the ground. But in the middle of the prayer he suddenly remembered the realities of the case, and added, "But what need I talk. When I was up at Shotts the other day everything was as green as leeks!"

After a long season of drought, the minister of a rural parish was reminded by some of his congregation, specially interested in agricultural matters, that he had omitted to ask for some refreshing rain. In reply, the minister explained the cause of the omission, but he added, "I'll pray for rain to please ye. Feint a drop, however, ye'll get till the mune changes."

A city minister, preaching in the Carse of Gowrie,

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was approached by some members of the congregation, and desired to remember in prayer the ripening crops, and to supplicate for them a few gentle showers. Petitioning for more than he was instructed to ask, he prayed that "the windows of Heaven might be opened to cheer the thirsty ground, and fulfil the earnest hopes of the husbandman."

As if in answer, the windows of Heaven were opened, the thunder rolled and growled, and there followed such a downpour of rain that much of the standing corn in the Carse was broken and ruined. Ascribing this unfortunate state of matters to the minister's prayer, one of the farmers affected by the disaster remarked—"That puir body may do well enuch in the toon ; but, Lord keep us a', the suner he's out o' the country the better for a' pairties."

Agricultural people are difficult to satisfy in regard to the weather. At one time they desire "some refreshing rain"; and at another "a few gentle showers." But the petitioning minister must be careful to frame his petition to the needs of his particular flock. One minister was reminded of this by a deputation which waited upon him at the manse one Saturday evening to warn him to be very cautious as to the way in which he should frame his petition next day in church. "The last time ye prayed for rain," said one of the deputation, "the weather broke down a' the-gether, and the thing turned oot fair redeeklus."

"Trust me, gentlemen," said the minister in reply. "Attend the kirk the morn an' ye'll hear what I hae to ask." Acting up to the instructions received, the

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minister is reported to have prayed, "An' noo, Lord, I hae a petition to present, but I maun be unco wary in the wordin' o't. Thou kenst the kittle state the crops are in, therefore just send us a soughin', southron, dreein' breeze, as it'll save the strae an' winna harm the heid. For if Thou send a tearin', reevin', thunderin' storm, as Thou didst the last time I prayed for gude weather, Thou'lt play the mischief wi' the aits, an' fairly spoil a'."

The incidents of everyday life were not forgotten in the prayers, nor were farmers and fishermen the only persons prayed for. Here is the way in which a preacher at Lochmaben interceded for the authorities of that burgh: "We would remember in prayer the magistrates of this town——" But not knowing apparently how or what more to ask in this connection, the minister suddenly stopped. Then, when enlightenment came, he added, "Such as they are."

An auld Fife minister went farther afield than farmers, fishermen and magistrates; for at the end of a long prayer on Sunday morning, in which he had not failed to remember all sorts and conditions of men, he extended his sympathies even beyond the human family. Half apologetically, he is said to have invited the congregation to join him in praying for "the Deil, as nobody remembers *him* in prayer now."

This was sympathy of no common order—a sympathy akin to that expressed by Burns in his famous address to the personage under reference—

"But fare ye weel, Auld Nickie-ben!  
O wad ye tak' a thought and men'!

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Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—  
Still hae a stake !  
I'm wae to think upon yon den,  
Even for your sake !”

Occasionally prayers have to be offered up on occasions of Public Thanksgiving, and sometimes the thanksgiving is by Royal Command. At the close of the American War of Independence such a thanksgiving was appointed, and a large congregation assembled to hear how the witty and eccentric Mr. Thom of Govan would give thanks for the inglorious close of a war which had affected Glasgow direfully. He proceeded as follows: “My friends, we are commanded by royal authority to meet this day for the purpose of public thanksgiving. Now I should like to know what it is we are to give thanks for. Is it for the loss of thirteen provinces? Is it for the slaughter of so many thousands of our countrymen? Is it for so many millions of increased national debt?” Then looking round upon his hearers who were smiling broadly, he added: “I see, my friends, you are laughing at me, and I am not surprised at it. For were I not standing where I am, I would be laughing myself.”

Some ministers used to indulge in prayers of portentous length, which were a sore weariness of the flesh to the congregation. Against this practice one learned professor warned his students, saying, “My young friends, I do not know that Satan ever practised any device that has been so successful in discouraging people, but the young especially, from at-

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tending God's house, as long prayers." In saying this the professor was stating a fact to which too many of his brethren were blind. The prayer usually offered up shortly before the sermon wandered over all possible fields of supplication. But even these fields have their limits, and in the fullness of time the prayer was ended, a psalm sung, and the sermon was reached.

Our ancestors in church-going Scotland delighted in a well-chosen text—short, direct, and to the point. In their estimation the text seemed to be almost of as much importance as the sermon itself. It is recorded of an auld wife that she had "nae great brew o' the minister wha had a lang screed o' the Bible for a text." And this was the reason annexed—"I hae aye noticed that ae man's work is but little seen on a big job."

In connection with this important matter of the text, the following incident took place in Glasgow. The Town Council, who had the patronage of the City Churches, wisely exercised a wholesome discretion in the matter of appointment when any vacancy occurred. On such occasions they used to send a deputation of their number to hear the candidates preach, with instructions to report upon the matter at the next meeting of Council.

In the performance of such a duty it once fell to the lot of the Provost and one of the Bailies to submit their report regarding the preachers whom they had heard on the previous Sunday. Having spoken in very glowing terms of one of the candidates, a Councillor at the foot of the table inquired of the Pro-

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vost what had been the text of the sermon which he and the Bailie had eulogised so highly.

"The text!" replied the Provost. "The text—the text; Bailie, what was it, again?"

But the Bailie was caught floundering too, and for the life of him could not recollect the text. Amidst the laughter of the Council the Provost suddenly and proudly exclaimed, "I have it now, gentlemen; I have it now—a beautiful text indeed—it was *Now's the day, and now's the hour!*"

To add to the hilarity of the Council the Bailie chimed in—"Yes, that's it." And so greatly relieved did he seem to be by the supposed solution of the difficulty that he began to supplement what the Provost had been saying about the sermon. The increased hilarity of the Council, however, only showed how much more the deputation was at home in "Scots Wha Hae," than in the scriptural text—"Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation."

A curious incident regarding a text is recorded by Dr. Charles Rogers in his *Century of Scottish Life*. Preaching in the Parish Church of Dunino on the evening of a Communion Sunday, Dr. James Hunter failed to find the text he had selected for the sermon he was just about to deliver. After a pause he exclaimed—"This is extraordinary; I cannot find my text. I marked it on the top of my sermon last night, and I thought it was in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the thirteenth chapter and twenty-second verse; but that's a mistake. The text is, 'Suffer the word of exhortation,' but where these words are I can't tell you. Your min-

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ister, however, has a good knowledge of passages. Ho!" exclaimed Dr. Hunter, looking towards the minister, who was seated in the family pew, "can you tell me where the text is?"

"You are quite right," replied the minister (Dr. Roger's father); "look at the passage you have named." But through some nervous flurry or other cause, the preacher could not find the text, and he had to go on without one. After service, he was informed that the text was in the middle clause of the verse which he had at first named, whereupon he called aloud in the churchyard to the retiring congregation, "Hilloa, my friends, the text is in the Hebrews after all. You'll find it when you get home."

One of the most amusing incidents in Barrie's *The Little Minister* is the scene in the kirk where Mr. Dishart announces that his text will be found in the eighth chapter of Ezra.

Ezra being a difficult book to find, the little minister looked round the kirk to see if he had puzzled anybody; and he seemed to have done so, for there was a general competition among the congregation who should lay hand on Ezra first. While the search was going on, the minister suddenly intimated a change of text by saying—"You will find it in Genesis, chapter three, verse six."

The fact of first giving out one text and then intimating a different one altogether was the most amazing thing, to the mind of Elspeth who relates the incident, that ever happened in the town of Thrums. "I wouldna hae missed it for a pound note."

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"Nor me," said Waster Lunny. . . . "Onybody can turn up Genesis, but it needs an able-bodied man to find Ezra."

If provosts, bailies, parish ministers, and Auld Licht ministers can get into such difficulties about the text, there need be no surprise expressed over the matter of a simple farm-servant being taken across the coals by his master one Sunday afternoon.

"Where was the text the day, John?"

"I dinna ken; I was owre late in gaun in."

"What was the end o't, then?"

"I dinna ken; I came out before it was dune."

"What did the minister say about the middle o't, then?"

"I dinna ken, for I sleepit a' the time."

Many and curious were the interpretations attached by preachers to texts which, to the laity, appeared of obvious meaning. Thus one theologian, discoursing upon the fall of Jericho, remarked:—

"My brethren, you are not to imagine that no more is meant here than the Jericho Israel invested. The text has another, and a spiritual, meaning. It is to adumbrate or shadow forth New Testament times. It has also a hidden and allegorical meaning, and refers to the human heart. The wall that encircles it is the wall of sin which is around every heart. And the touting o' the tups' horns, at the sound o' which the stanes o' the wa's cam' rattling down, is the sound o' the minister preaching the gospel; and the noise brings down the wa's about the sinners' heart."

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The modern mind is inclined to cavil at this style of interpretation. Another theologian adopted a different and more cautious method when encountering a portion of scripture of doubtful meaning. "My friends," he observed, "this is a dark and difficult passage; the one that follows is clear enough, so we shall just take it up."

In Highland parishes ministers are well advised to keep clear, as far as possible, of disputed points of doctrine. About the time of the passing of the Declaratory Act there was much religious unrest in the Western Highlands, and two or three congregations seceded from the Free Church. About that time a well-known Ross-shire minister was preaching to a large congregation at Ullapool, after the Communion service. Suddenly he came full tilt against one of the knotty points of the day. Every one listened, with bated breath, to hear how he would treat the matter. But the ministerial wisdom was equal to the occasion. "Ah, my friends," he cried, "these things are difficult. They are dangerous. They are not for you. They are for Theologians, like myself."

Long ago there seemed to be as much criticism on the text of a sermon as on the sermon itself. Shortly after Dr. Lawson's settlement at Selkirk, he was told by one of his hearers that the congregation were very well pleased with his sermon, but by no means with his texts.

"Ah," replied the minister, "I could understand what you say had you told me that the congrega-







QUITTING THE HOUSE  
By Sir George Frederic Watts, R.A.



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tion were dissatisfied with my sermons. But the texts! What is wrong with them?"

"Oh, I don't know," was the reply, "but that's what they say, and I like to speak my mind."

"Just so; and do you know what Solomon says of you and the like of you?"

"No; what does Solomon say?"

"He says that a fool uttereth all his mind, but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards."

Another minister had his text criticised, but in a very different fashion from the last instance.

Preaching in the Church of Portsoy from the text, "In My Father's house are many mansions," he was interrupted by a poor insane woman in the congregation who knew both the preacher and the farm where he had been brought up. "Many mansions! Auld Bankies! I kent it weel—a but an' a ben; an' e'en that was but ill redd up."

Writing of texts, one wonders how church-goers of the present day would like to hear sermon after sermon on the same text, for several Sundays in succession? In the *Records of the Parish of Ellon*, Mr. Mair states that it was the custom to treat a text so in that district at least; and he relates how a Mr. Fraser preached from Romans viii. and 28, "for eleven Sabbaths, and, including the afternoons, the sermon was delivered *no fewer than eighteen times* until a change came."

Describing the rise and progress of the smuggling trade, and the evil effects it had upon the population of his parish, the minister of Dalmailing says he did

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all in his power to check the evil by *preaching sixteen times* from the text, "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." That was not all, however, for he proceeds, "I visited and I exhorted; I warned and I prophesied; I told them that although money came in like slate stanes, it would go like snow off the dyke."

Dr. Lawson, of Selkirk, had a marvellous facility in selecting a text to suit a sermon on any subject that happened to come suddenly before the public. The news of Napoleon's banishment to St. Helena, for example, reached the Doctor when on a visit to Annan. Next day he preached from the text Jeremiah 1. 23, "How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken." And when the startling news of Mr. Percival's assassination in the lobby of the House of Commons came to Selkirk one Saturday evening, Dr. Lawson preached from the text Job xxxiv. 20, "In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away; and the mighty shall be taken away without hand."

Apropos of this facility in text selection, a story is told of a preacher who accepted a challenge to preach extempore on any text which he should find in the pulpit. To confuse him the challenger placed there a blank sheet of paper. The preacher accepted it without demur, and presently delivered an eloquent sermon on 1 Kings xviii. 43, "And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing."

Of anecdotes and stories about oddly-selected texts there is no end. In his *Twenty-Five Years of St.*

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*Andrews*, Dr. A. K. H. Boyd states that he once heard a remarkably eloquent and pathetic sermon from the text, "A colt, the foal, of an ass." Not only heard it, but remembered it vividly after the lapse of more than forty years.

A preacher once chose for his text the single word "Follow," and pegged away at great length on four different kinds of people who follow—to wit, "Followers ahint, followers afore, followers cheek by jowl, and followers that stand still." The edification in that style of treatment must have been but small.

Occasionally in the minister's choice of a text one comes across some bits of humour, genuine in their way, and perfectly excusable in the circumstances. Here is a story about two candidates and the texts they selected. Their names were Adam and Low. Mr. Low officiated in the forenoon, and took for his text "*Adam*, where art thou?" Adam, being equal to the occasion, selected for his text, "Lo, here am I," and acquitted himself so well that he afterwards received the appointment.

The Rev. Mr. Paul was famous for the humour he showed in the selection of his texts. When he left Ayr, where he had been a great favourite with the ladies, he preached his valedictory discourse from the text, "And they all fell on Paul's neck and kissed him." On another occasion, when called upon to preach before a military audience, the prevailing colour of whose uniform was *green*, he selected for his text, "I see men as *trees* walking."

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One scarcely knows what to make of the minister who preached on the Sunday morning previous to his marriage from the text, "He went on his way rejoicing." That was intelligible enough, but what could be inferred from the text when he selected on his next appearance—"O, wretched man that I am!"

Undoubtedly the people of church-going Scotland long ago delighted in a well-chosen text, and the text seemed almost of as much importance as the sermon itself. Of so much importance, indeed, that when a Scotchman, even of the present day, once hears a striking sermon on some particular text, he can never afterwards disassociate that text from the sermon, or the sermon from the text. In a little book full of the choicest stories of auld Scotch clergymen—Mr. Walker's *Craigdam and its Ministers*—there is an illustration of this. The Rev. Mr. Angus of Aberdeen, having been asked to preach at Craigdam, consented; but when he arrived at the village he recollected that the sermon he had brought with him had been preached there not very long before. Mr. Angus thought that by changing the text he might get out of the difficulty, as no one would recognise or remember it under the altered conditions. He was mistaken, however; for on asking one of the elders how he liked the sermon, the latter replied—"Oh, very well, but I liket it better wi' its ain text."

Nothing in literature seems to stand so much criticism as the sermon. This may be accounted for by the fact that one may not criticise the sermon in church.

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Therefore human nature revenges itself by flying to criticism out of church, in every conceivable kind of situation and circumstance.

There are, however, instances in which this unwritten law as to non-permission or prohibition has been set aside; but these instances are rare—so rare, indeed, that there are on record only a few isolated cases. In his *Twenty-Five Years of St. Andrews*, Dr. A. K. H. Boyd refers to the story of King James VI.'s visit to the ancient city by the sea, and his occupying the magistrates' seat during public worship in the parish church. While listening to the sermon His Majesty is said to have lost patience and called out to the preacher either to stop talking nonsense or to come down from the pulpit. The preacher, however, replied that he would neither stop talking nonsense nor would he come down from the pulpit. Such an answer says something for the preacher's courage, if little for his worldly wisdom.

One of Dr. Norman Macleod's parishioners in Campsie was an original—Old Bell, as he was called, author of *Bell's Geography*, and editor of *Rollin's Ancient History*. During public worship Bell used to utter aloud his dissent to any doctrine he disliked. On one occasion a young preacher having chosen for his text, "There shall be no more sea," proceeded to argue that such a change would have many advantages over the present arrangement of land and water. This argument, however, found no support from Old Bell, who had his own ideas on physical geography. Bringing his staff down on the floor with

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an emphatic "thud" he characterised the preacher in this pregnant utterance, "Bah, the fule!"

The predominant characteristic of the old-time sermon was its length, and the weariness of body and irritation of mind which that length produced. A sore point was this of the long sermon: sorer far than the nonsense King James had to listen to at St. Andrews, or the argument for no more sea by the preacher at Campsie. The special aggravation of the case was that the wearisomeness of the long sermon affected the hearer only; while the preacher pegged away, all unconscious of the mischief that might be brewing among the silent but suffering congregation.

Some ministers appeared to revel in the sound of their own voices. Such an one was the preacher who blandly remarked to a long-suffering congregation, "Seventeenthly, my brethren, *and not to be tedious.*" Doubtless the congregation appreciated the parenthesis.

But a glimmering consciousness, on the part of the minister, of the listeners' sufferings, appears to have manifested itself at least once in bygone days. After a long discourse one day, a preacher was asked if he did not feel exhausted by such a lengthened effort. "Na, na," said he; "but, losh me, how wearied the congregation seemed to be!"

"Ye have need of patience," was the text from which a minister once preached to the Commissioners of Assembly in St. Giles' Cathedral. It was impossible, says Dr. Boyd in relating the incident, to describe

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how heartily the whole congregation agreed with the text long before the sermon was half done.

A memorable case of patience under a sermon occurs in the famous scene where Captain Dugald Dalgetty, in the *Legend of Montrose*, listens to the preacher in the private chapel of Inveraray Castle. "Never," says Sir Walter, "was a sermon listened to with more impatience, and less edification, on the part of one at least of the audience. The captain heard *sixteenthly*—*seventeenthly*—*eighteenthly*—and *to conclude*—with a sort of feeling like distracted despair."

When Mr. Russell, afterwards of Yarrow, was settled in Ettrick, he received this piece of advice from one of the heritors of the parish—an advice which not only touched upon the sore point of long sermons, but which also showed the self-consequence of the individual who volunteered it. "When I," said the laird, "am in church, or if Lord Napier is there, I hope you will be somewhat moderate in length; when we are not present you can take your swing."

The length of a sermon in the auld days, and in modern days as well, seemed to bear some proportion to its weakness. Probably its very weakness was the cause of its excessive length. On going into the vestry after service one Sunday in the Lothians, one of the elders remarked to the preacher, "Ye've gi'en us an extra lang sermon the day, sir." "Yes," replied the minister, "as I know that you East Lothian farmers like good measure." "We do," replied the farmer, "but we like it weel dichted."

There is a story which illustrates the difference be-

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tween the old-fashioned long sermon and the modern short one. An old parishioner discussing a new minister, remarked: "Wi' oor auld minister we got first the text, syne the heads, and maybe part o' the sermon; an' we could aye tak' a sleep and wak' up in plenty o' time for *the practical*. But the new minister gi'es the text, an' heads or no heads; an' just fan we're beginnin' tae hae a nap, the minister's up an' ruslin' amang the Psalms."

A favourite time for discussing the sermon was, and still is, while walking home from church. The Scottish heart loves to tackle the sermon; and even the minister's personal appearance should be "an exchange" for the day.

The following is a fair sample of rustic criticism. The sermon of a preacher in St. Michael's, Dumfries, on the text, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," was under discussion by a party of auld wives on their way home. One who had not yet spoken was asked to state her opinion. Glad of the opportunity, she opened her lips and said, not in the language of the schools, but in that of the farmyard: "Leeze me abune them a' for yon auld, beld, clear-headed man that spoke sae bonnie on the angels when he said, 'Raphel sings, an' Gabrel tunes his gouden harp, an' a' the rest clap their wings wi' joy.' Oh, but it was graun'! It just put me in mind"—and here the old woman soared away into the region of natural and untutored eloquence—"just put me in mind o' our geese at Dunjarg, as they turn their nebs to the south, an' clap

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their wings when they scent the comin' rain after a lang drouth."

Greater praise than this could scarcely be given. Another homely criticism on a sermon that had just been delivered on the subject of covetousness and the love of money being the root of all evil, was as follows:—

"Wasna the minister gran' the day about the siller, Mrs. Johnston?"

"Ay, he was gran'," was the reply, in a tone, however, that harboured a doubt; "but eh, woman, isn't it nice to hae a pickle siller in the pouch when ye gang to the toon an' see the shops?"

A country woman, whilst on a visit to a large manufacturing town in the West, went to hear a celebrated divine whose field of labour lay there, and whose fame had reached her lonely home. On her return she was asked her opinion of "The Star of the West," as he was often called. "Oh," she replied, "he's a wonnerfu' preacher—a great preacher." "Well," said the questioner, "that no doubt is true. But what did you think of his views on doctrinal points, and his powers of expounding the scriptures?" "Oh," said the woman, "I dinna ken; but he's jist a wonnerfu' man." "But what did he say?" "Oh, he jist gaed on, an' gaed on, an' chappit on his Bible, and raised his twa hands abune his head, and then gaed on again, and gaed on again; an' then he swat and rubbit his brow; an' when he stoppit, he looked as if he could have said mair than when he began—oh, he's a wonderfu' grand preacher!"

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After Dr. Thomson, of Markinch, had delivered an impressive discourse on the text, "Look not on the wine when it is red in the cup," two drouthy chieles, on the way home, overhauled the sermon. "What thocht ye o't?" asked one, by way of introducing the subject.

"'Deed, Davie," said the other, "I'm mair inclined to criticeese the minister than the sermon."

"Ay, an' what do ye make o' the minister?"

"Oh, just this: I think he's been a gey lad in his day, or he couldna say sae muckle about the bit dram. Davie, my man, take the word o' an auld man; he's a slee hand, the minister!"

There is a great deal of human nature in the inductive process of reasoning here employed, for it served to render the two worthies impervious to the personal application of the sermon, "Thou art the man!" Another preacher seems to have been more successful in his attempt at pointing the moral and driving home the application. Dr. Kidston, the minister referred to, enjoyed the reputation of being "a hard hitter," and he was worthy of the reputation, as may be gathered from the following dialogue:—

"How did he get on the day?" an auld wife was asked on her way home by one who had not been able to be at church that morning.

"How did he get on? He just stood and threw stanes at us, an' never missed wi' ane o' them. My certie, but yon *was* preachin'!"

Another description of "something like preaching" is contained in the enthusiastic language of a

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farmer's wife. "Man, John, yon was something for a body to bring away: nine heads, an' twenty particulars to ilka head! An' sic mouthfu's o' gran' words! Oh man, John, but it was gran', and would do us a' muckle guid if we could mind anything o't."

About the beginning of the nineteenth century there resided in Glasgow a certain Mr. James Bell, who had a great reputation as a caustic critic of the ministry. He is said to have advised a budding clergyman as follows: "Never begin two days following in the same strain, and if you should happen to be at a loss try to get up a bit greet. If you can do that your fortune's made. There's anither thing ye nicht remember wi' advantage in the pulpit—find fault wi' the translation o' the scriptures. Tear't in bits. Then ye'll be considered a second Solomon.

"If you are lecturing, spin out your discourse over the first verse or twa, an' say at the conclusion, 'We could add a heap mair did our time permit. But this, an' the illustration o' what follows, we must leave over till another opportunity.' Then dinna tak' up the subject again if ye can help it.

"Ye nicht wi' advantage find out a hidden meaning in your text. It will, maybe, be easier for ye to do that than to find out the real one. Amang a' the books o' the Bible there's yin taken up by a heap o' fools, an' that is the Book of Revelation. Be cautious aboot meddlin' wi' it, for ye may mak' a fool o' yourself. But if ye maun meddle with it, just tak' a trot up an' down among the seven Kirks o' Asia; but dinna gang beyond them."

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

All which advice, excellent in the old days, is excellent still.

Among the many different styles of oratory affected by the clergy there is one which has very varying effects upon the listeners, namely, the tearful or lachrymose style. It may perhaps appeal to the ladies, but to the unsentimental male it savours of drivel. Two gentlemen were one day discussing the weeping tendency which their minister had developed.

"It's very odd," remarked one, "that Doctor Blank should have acquired this style of preaching."

"Not at all," replied the other. "Not at all. For if they put you up yonder in the pulpit, and you found you had as little to say, my word ! you would greet too."

Ministers have been known to preach, without any acknowledgment, sermons which were the work of better men. Such conduct is of course to be condemned. Far preferable is the attitude of a Brechin clergyman who, after giving out his text, remarked, "My brethren, the sermon which I am about to deliver is not my own ; but it is a better one than any I ever composed in my life." Thereupon he delivered it, to the marked satisfaction of the congregation.

Sometimes the sermon was discussed and criticised from the professional point of view occupied by the critics. This was almost always dangerous ground for the minister, as it was not desirable to find him tripping. Dr. Guthrie, in his *Autobiography*, tells a story in this connection. A reverend doctor of his acquaintance once went to preach in Glenisla for Mr. Martin,

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the parish minister. The Doctor thought that Glenisla being a pastoral district, the 23rd Psalm would form a peculiarly suitable subject; and from that he delivered an admirable discourse.

But there was a "dead fly" in the ointment, that marred the sermon and lowered the minister in the eyes of the congregation. Ignorant of the fact that the sheep, in our moist climate and amongst the dew-covered and green succulent herbage, are independent of streams, and indeed seldom drink water except when they are sick, he expatiated on the importance of the still water to the flocks—a blunder and display of ignorance that was soon noticed by the hearers. As some of them lingered to light their pipes by the church door after the service, the Doctor had the mortification of hearing himself and his sermon treated with undisguised contempt—one shepherd saying to another, "Puir bodie! Heard ye ever the like o' yon about the sheep drinkin'?"

Sometimes there are cantankerous, or at least censorious, critics among the flock. Such men consider that they could make a much better job of the preaching than the minister himself. One worthy of this description once took it upon himself to train up his minister in the way he should go. He approached the subject in this fashion: "Ye should lay out your discourse a' into heads an' particulars, sir, and first raise a doctrine out of your text, and then lay out your heads and particulars. The marrow, sir, is the Doctrine." "Yes," replied the minister, who was a humble-minded man, "but it is sometimes difficult to

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raise a Doctrine, as you call it, out of certain subjects." "Difficult, said ye!" was the answer, "you that has sae muckle learning, and as mony books as would build a rick. I think, little wit as I hae, and far less learnin', I could do't. A' scripture, ye ken, is given for Doctrine as well as for reproof, as I tak' it." "Well, then, William," was the quiet reply, "what doctrine would you raise from the passage, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who art thou?'"

The following criticism is an odd blend of candour, compliment, and unintentional reproof.

"What thocht ye o' my discourse this afternoon, Tammas?" asked a clergyman of an old member of his congregation who enjoyed a reputation as a sermon-taster.

"'Deed, sir, I thocht ye verra dry—verra dry. No' like yoursel'. But maybe we shouldna' complain; for sometimes the richest land is turned into barrenness for the sins of those that dwell therein."

One likes to read about these homely criticisms, as they argued on the part of the hearers that they had been listening to the sermon, and had managed to pick up, in some degree, at least, the drift of the discourse. There have been instances, however, when the minister seems to have got beyond the reach or the depth of his audience, as in the case of a lady, who declared to her friend that she could make nothing of the minister she had heard that morning. This friend suggested that probably the preacher was too deep. "No, no," said the other, "not deep, but drumly."

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Occasionally, however, the preacher got into water that was both deep and drumly. "I canna say"—said an auld man to his minister one day when the latter called—"I canna say that I followed ye on Sabbath last when ye spoke o' sirkumlycution, or some sic word."

"Oh," said the minister, "you did very well if you followed me up to that point. The apostle, as I tried to show, was only employing a periphrastic mode of diction in his statement of the argument." "Quite so," was the reply; but it did not seem to be a "quite so" that brought enlightenment, or carried conviction.

To closer quarters came the minister and a party of his hearers, as related in the next incident. Dr. Risk, of Dalserf, had a deputation from the evangelical portion of his congregation calling at the manse one night, and on asking what they might be wanting with him, the spokesman replied that they had come to converse with him.

"Upon what subject?" asked the Doctor, who belonged to the old moderate party in the church.

"About your preaching, Doctor."

"About my preaching! What have you to say about that?"

"Weel, we dinna think ye tell us eneuch about renouncing our ain righteousness."

"Renouncing your ain righteousness!" exclaimed the minister, in astonishment. "I never knew that ye had any righteousness to renounce!"

Scottish literature is full of stories and anecdotes

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of the once popular pastime of sleeping in the church. Dr. Guthrie having stated on a public occasion that he once saw six hundred persons sleeping in church at Thurso, a Carnoustie poet, Andrew Scott, was so much exercised by the Doctor's statement that he set to work and composed, not a poem, but a parody to commemorate the event. The subjoined verses are a fair sample of "The Sleep of the Heavy Brigade":—

Half a nod, half a nod,  
Half a nod downwards,  
All through the House of God  
Nod the Six Hundred.  
Down went the hoary head,  
So the great Guthrie said ;  
Soundly all through the kirk  
Slept the Six Hundred.

Vainly the preacher roared,  
Snugly they slept and snored,  
Within the crowded pew ;  
Heads on the Bible board,  
Dosed the Six Hundred.

Then the precentor rose,  
Right through the line he goes ;  
Sleeper and slumberer,  
Roused by old Bangor's notes,  
Looked up dumbfounded,  
All that awoke—but not,  
Not the Six Hundred.

It must have been of this sleepy period in the church that the story is told of a minister who stopped in the middle of his sermon, and addressing personally one of his hearers, asked, "Are ye hearin', John?" "Ay,







THE STOOL OF REPENTANCE

By David Allan



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I'm hearin', minister; but to very little purpose," was the unexpected reply.

Different ministers had different ways of tackling this sore subject. Dr. Lawson tried mild remonstrance, and found it wonderfully effective. No angry rebuke did he administer; he simply ceased speaking for a minute, and when the bowed heads were raised and the wondering eyes were "at attention," the Doctor quietly asked, "Are you not a strange people? When I speak, ye sleep; and when I cease to speak, ye waken up!"

Mr. Bonar of Auchtermuchty tried a different method. Preaching one day at Kettle, Fife, he observed that a great many of the congregation were sleeping while he was speaking. Unable to endure the trial any longer, Mr. Bonar paused, and then said, "My friends, some of you may probably not understand the word *hyperbole*, which I have had occasion to use more than once in my discourse. Let me explain its meaning before I go any further. Suppose I were to say that this congregation were *all* asleep at the present moment, I would be using a *hyperbole*, or speaking hyperbolically; because, on looking round, I don't believe that *more than the one-half of you are sleeping*."

Another minister did not get on so well, owing to a lamentable defect in his knowledge of human nature. In Udny Church on Sunday, probably owing to the soporific nature of the sermon, or from some cause or causes not yet made known, the disposition to sleep on the part of the congregation was unusually great.

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There was only one member who seemed to be listening to the minister, and that was Jamie Fleeman, the reputed fool of the parish.

Stopping his sermon, the minister exclaimed, "This sleeping's perfectly dreadful. There's only one man awake, and that man's a fool!" "Ay, ay, minister, ye're richt there," said Fleeman, in reply. "But gin I hadna been a fool, I wad been sleepin' tae."

An amusing story is told, in this connection, of a young minister who was preaching in a strange church. Anxious to make a good impression, he was exerting all his powers of oratory in his sermon, when, just as he imagined he was at his very best, an elderly man of austere demeanour rose from a prominent pew and left the church. The preacher was considerably put out, but finished his discourse to the best of his ability. Arrived in the vestry at the close of the service, he was met by one of the elders who congratulated him warmly upon his sermon. After the incident in the church, this praise was most gratifying to the minister, who, while thanking the elder for his appreciation, remarked that he was afraid every one had not been pleased with the sermon, as he had noticed one gentleman get up and leave the church.

"Hoots, man!" answered the elder, "never fash your heid about yon man. He's a somnambulist."

A witty allusion to the slumberous proclivities of congregations was once made by a Glasgow professional man who, in the company of a French gentleman, was walking past the door of the Park Parish Church as the congregation was beginning to dismiss

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from the forenoon service. As the first few people descended the steps the Frenchman asked—

“Who are these people?”

“These,” answered his friend, “are the first-fruits of them that slept.”

Sleeping in church, however, was only one of the trials with which the auld Scotch minister had to contend. He had many others to face; and the conflict occasionally brought out some fine strokes of quiet humour. In a Paisley church the minister used to be sorely tried by many of the congregation making a bad habit of coming late—so late that one Sunday, stopping in his reading, the minister remarked—“Look on your books, my friends; dinna distract me, an’ dinna distract yoursel’s. I’ll tell ye wha comes in late next Sabbath.”

When next Sunday came the minister kept his word. As the first of the late comers appeared, the minister stopped the chapter. “That,” said he, “is Mr. A——; ye a’ ken him. Here’s another—Mr. B——. He lives down the street a few doors, an’ therefore has no excuse for being late. An’ while I’m speakin’, here’s a third. He’s a wee man wi’ a white hat and a drab coat. Take a look at him if ye like, for I dinna ken him.”

The country minister had generally his eyes and ears open for the sights and sounds of nature, and borrowed, indeed, more from her open book than from the bound volumes in his library. While reading the apostolic exhortations in the fifth chapter of Ephesians, a preacher paused after he finished the verse—

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“ See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

“ Ay, friends,” said the minister, “ you have all seen a cat walking along a garden wall among pieces of broken glass. See at him ! See how carefully he picks his steps and looks round about him. Not even a fricht, or a stane frae an ill-deedy laddie, will make him forget where he is, or forget to wale his steps. That, my friends, is walking circumspectly.”

Another preacher had occasion to dwell upon the subject of tact, and proceeded thus—

“ Tact, my friends, is a praiseworthy thing. But as some o’ ye may not rightly understand the meanin’ o’ the word I’ll just give ye an illustration. Suppose, for example, that one o’ ye died an’ went up to the Gates o’ Heaven. An’ suppose he found St. Peter there, he wouldna be sayin’ onything tae him aboot cock-crawin’. Weel, that’s tact.”

In the sermon, as in the chapter, the preacher frequently received some new inspiration that sent him off at a tangent to give expression to that inspiration. Dr. Paul, in his *Past and Present of Aberdeenshire*, tells us of a minister who, while preaching on the subject of the wiles and crafts of Satan, suddenly paused and then exclaimed, “ See him sittin’ there in the crap o’ the wa’. What shall we do wi’ him, my brethren ? He winna hang, for he’s as licht as a feather ; neither will he droon, my brethren, for he can soom like a cork ; but we’ll shoot him wi’ the gun o’ the gospel.” Then putting himself in the position of one aiming at

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an object, the minister called out exultingly, "Bang! He's doon like a dead crow!"

This incident would have greatly delighted the man who thus described the kind of minister he was in search of: "Nane o' your guid-warks men, or preachers o' cauld morality for me! Gie me a speerit-rousin' preacher that'll hold the deil under the noses of the congregation and make their flesh creep!"

The Devil had a very real and personal presence for the superstitious Highlanders. Taking advantage of this fact, a certain Highland preacher once addressed his congregation on the subject.

"My friends," he said, "the Devil is bound round the middle with chains, and round the arms with chains, and round the legs with chains. But, Dougal More," pointing to a man in the front row, "he can reach you. And you, Colin Beg," pointing to one in the middle row, "he can reach you. And," pointing to one at the back, "Parlan M'Farlane, he can reach you." To which Parlan dramatically replied, "Tammit, meenister, ye may as weel let the critter loose."

Another Highland minister, who evidently had scoffers in his parish, preached an eloquent sermon one Sunday on the subject of Eternal Punishment, and wound up his discourse by remarking with deep earnestness, "There wass some wasssayin' there wass no Deevil. Ah, my friends! They will find out ferry soon."

Pretty much the same sentiment was displayed by a preacher in Johnstone who, after a sermon on the

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blessedness of drudgery, wound up by reciting, with desperate grimness, the verse—

Idle men and boys are found  
Standing on the devil's ground,  
He will give them work to do.  
He will pay them wages too.

The last line was carefully emphasised.

The Rev. Mr. Glass was preaching once on the subject of the Early Christians, and the inhuman cruelties to which they were subjected in the reign of Nero. "The persecutor," Mr. Glass proceeded to state, "would tear the very flesh from the bones with red-hot—red—red——." Here the preacher paused as if at a loss for the name of the instrument of torture that was employed.

"Pinchers, Mr. Glass; red-hot pinchers, ye ken," called out a voice from the gallery.

"Thank ye, James; thank ye kindly. You're quite right; it was jist red-hot pinchers."

Another minister showed little gratitude under somewhat similar circumstances. The subject was Jonah; and as the peroration was being reached, the minister looked round the congregation inquiringly, and asked, "What sort of fish had been sent to swallow the prophet, think ye? Was it a shark, my brethren? No, it was not a shark, for the Lord would never permit his servant to get among the teeth of such a terrible brute. Was it a salmon, my friends? No, it was not a salmon, for the biggest salmon in the river couldna gie Jonah lodgings an' it had been willing. Was it a sea-horse, or a sea-lion, or what was it, my friends, if ye can tell me?"

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Here an auld wife sitting on the pulpit stair, thinking that her minister had got into a serious difficulty, gallantly came to his rescue by calling out, "It was a whale, minister!"

But the assistance was scornfully rejected with the basest ingratitude by the minister, who called out, "Hout, tout, ye graceless woman; how daur ye take the word out o' your minister's mouth in that way?"

In *Craigdam and its Ministers* there is much interesting information about the Rev. Patrick Robertson. "His plain speaking," says Mr. Walker, the author, "his broad vernacular Scotch, his quaint, forcible, yet often ludicrous illustrations, were novelties in the city (Aberdeen), and were highly relished by multitudes not only of the common class, but by critics, literary men, and all lovers of originality."

Preaching on the condition of the Israelites in Egypt, and the call of Moses, Mr. Robertson said, "Weel, sirs, an' far div ye think he fan God's chosen people? He fan them in the land of Goshen, wi' their sarksleevesrowed up to the oxters, busy kirnin' among clay, an' makin' bricks."

Lecturing at Burghead on the call of David, Mr. Robertson described it in vivid dramatic language. The seven sons having been all introduced to Samuel, the prophet asked, "'Hae ye nae ither bairns, Jesse?' 'Oh ay, there is anither bit callant, awa' out owre at the hirdin'.' 'Lat's see him, man; lat's see him.' So Jesse gaed to the door," and Mr. Robertson, as if putting himself in Jesse's place, waved his hand and shouted

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out, “‘Dauvid, my mannie, Dauvid, come awa’ hame; there’s somebody here wantin’ to see ye.’”

If any one should imagine from these extracts that Mr. Robertson’s preaching savoured of levity in the pulpit, he is mistaken. From levity Mr. Robertson was entirely free. He and his hearers were intimately acquainted with each other; and there was no fear of his being misunderstood or harshly judged in any of his utterances.

The Rev. Mr. Cook, at one time a minister in Inverness, was a man of genuine piety and devoted zeal, but his sayings in the pulpit were frequently of an extraordinary nature, though at the same time perfectly sincere. “I wouldna be a king,” said Mr. Cook on one occasion. “I wouldna be a queen. No, no, my friends, I would rather be a wo-rum. I would rather be a puddock: for its eas-ier for a cow to climb a tree wi’ her tail and hind legs foremost, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

This illustration of the cow seems to have been a favourite with auld Scotch ministers. In lecturing on that question in the Shorter Catechism, “Is any man in this life able perfectly to keep the commandments?” Mr. Robertson, of Craigdam, gravely and solemnly informed his audience, “Ye can nae mair dee’t, ma freens, then a coo can clim’ up a tree.” He may probably have been the first to employ the illustration; but as it passed from pulpit to pulpit, it gathered a little here and there in force and humour. To climb the tree at all was a great feat for the cow, even in imagination. But to do so with her tail and her hind

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legs foremost, would be a performance of which any cow might be justly proud.

One more instance of the use of the cow in illustration may be given. An old Fifeshire minister once pleaded solemnly, and at great length, with his hearers to accept the proffered mercy of the gospel. Then to touch the agricultural mind he leaned over the front of the pulpit, and in a deeply earnest tone gave utterance as follows: "Ah, my friends, the gospel udder is full of rich creamy milk. The humble mind bends down, and is satisfied."

After such free-and-easy pulpit oratory as some of the foregoing, one can easily imagine what a commotion would be caused in those congregations where the ministers dropped their homely and unconventional style of preaching and took to reading carefully prepared sermons. In bygone days church-going people had to endure long sermons, and some have to endure them even yet; but old-time folk drew the line of endurance at *preaching*, and would on no account listen to *reading*. In their eyes the *reading* was not the *preaching* of the Word, and this had been "rubbed into" them from their earliest years by the teaching of the Shorter Catechism. However well such a great preacher as Dr. Chalmers may have read his sermons—and he read them admirably—the fact remains that he gave great offence by using "the paper," and reading his sermon off that paper like any ordinary individual not consecrated to the ministry. Shortly before the doctor's death, he was conducting public worship at Cappercleuch, near St. Mary's Loch.

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Among his hearers was an old seceder, Jenny Biggar of Edinhope, who regretted having gone so far to hear a man read a sermon! So sorely, indeed, did Jenny feel upon the point that she characterised the action of the great Scottish preacher as "*a perfect intake.*"

Another ministerial personality was the man of action in the pulpit, who "thumped the Bible, an' made a' thing flee aboot." What would be thought of him when he sobered down, took out his paper, and began to read? Imagine such touches of humour as the following being committed to writing and read in cold ink! After describing the catastrophe that overtook Lot's wife, Mr. Munro of Westray broke out upon some weak place in the character of his people and exclaimed, "Oh, ye folk o' Westray, if ye had had this saut wife but a day amang ye, ye wad hae broken her in pieces and putten her in your parritchpat!" Or this from another minister in preaching on repentance. While about to bring down his uplifted hand on a fly which had alighted on the open Bible before him, he suddenly stopped the action as the fly flew off, whereupon the minister exclaimed, by way of improving the incident, "There's a chance for ye yet, my friends—flee from the wrath to come." Such comments as these were begotten of the inspiration that came in the pulpit, and had no connection with the careful preparation of the sermon in the study, or its deliberate delivery before an assembled congregation.

Charles Young, in his diary, describes the commo-

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tion which he witnessed while attending the Parish Church of Cults on Sunday morning. A "stranger" was preaching for the resident minister, and scarcely had he proceeded five minutes with his discourse when first one and then another of the congregation rose and left the church. "The exodus at last became so serious," writes Mr. Young, "that conceiving something to be wrong, probably a fire in the manse, I caught the infection, and eagerly inquired of the first person I encountered in the churchyard what was the matter, and was told with an expression of sovereign scorn and disgust, "Losh keep me, young man, have ye eyes and see ye not? Have ye ears and hear ye not? *The man reads.*"

The following amusing story bears upon this subject:—

A young preacher was employed by a relative who presides over the spiritualities of a parish at no great distance from Glasgow, to assist in the discharge of the laborious and important duties of a pastor. The young man, on all occasions, displayed much zeal in his endeavours to induce the dissenting parishioners to return within the walls of the Church. On one occasion, falling in with a decent matron attached to the Relief Body, he, as usual, urged his claim upon her attendance at the parish kirk. The scruples of the old lady were not, however, so easily got over, and at last she pointedly told him that she "didna like read sermons." "What would become of you, Janet," said the preacher, "if you were in England, where you would hear read prayers?" "Hech, sir!" was the

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unexpected answer, "I wonder what Jonah would hae done if he had ha'en to read his prayers!"

This reading business was no trifle. It stirred the people of Scotland as few events had stirred them in the history of their country—perhaps not quite so much as the Reformation in 1560, but apparently more greatly than the Reform Bill of 1832. Many lost their heads over the matter; and even women spake unadvisedly with their lips. When Dr. Blacklock, the blind preacher, was delivering his first discourse after being presented to the parish of Kirkcudbright, an auld wife asked another if she thought the new minister was *a reader*. "He canna be a reader, woman, for he's blind." "I'm glad to hear't," replied the other; "I wish they were a' blind!"

A trying time for ministers, as well as for people, was this paper business. The minister of Innerleithen, at the commencement of the sermon-reading movement, seems to have come through great tribulation ere light dawned upon him as to how best to avoid giving offence to his people. After enlightenment came, he wrote his sermons out on long strips like newspaper proofs and had them all carefully arranged in their proper order. When he had delivered the contents of slip number one, he let it slide quietly to the bottom of the pulpit, and then went ahead with number two. While practising this ingenious manœuvre, he was under the impression that no one would discover that he was a reader. But this impression was only an innocent delusion, as the sequel will show. Something having gone wrong with the

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machinery for disposing of the slips as delivered, the worthy minister kept hammering away at "Thirdly," but all the while rummaging about for the slip containing this particular and very much wanted head. It was found at last by an auld wife on the pulpit stair, who handed it up to the minister with the perfectly audible observation, "Here's thirdly, Mr. Pate." From this incident the minister was ever afterwards known as "Paper Pate."

The popular aversion to reading sermons may have arisen from a variety of causes. But the real pith of the matter is well expressed by Peter, one of the characters in that amusing work, *Stronbuy*. Peter, expressing his opinion of the ministers in his locality, said, "There's some uses the paper tarrible, and I canna thole them at a'."

Pressed to state his reasons, Peter replied, "Och, if the ministers canna remember their ain sermons, how can they expect us to remember them?"

The same thought seems to have been in the head of a woman who applied to Sir Henry Moncrieff for admission to the Lord's table. Finding her very defective in her religious knowledge, he dismissed her with instructions to learn the questions connected with the holy ordinance, and call on him again. A week afterwards she appeared in the minister's study and, to his great gratification, was quite ready with her answers. Happening to look up, however, the minister found that the woman quietly read the answers off the Shorter Catechism. Stopping her, he remarked that she ought to have learned them by

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heart; on which she made the unanswerable rejoinder, "Oh, Sir Harry, you that reads your sermon every Sabbath, winna ye let a puir body read her Carritcher?"

Rab Hamilton, a staunch seceder in Ayr, having gone to a parish church where the sermon was read, took his seat in an inside stair that had what was called a "wooden ravel"—whatever that may mean. In his anxiety to listen to the sermon, read though it was, Rab put his head through the railing, but he could not get it back when the sermon was concluded. Struggling to get his head returned to its orthodox position he was caught by the ears, and all his efforts only resulted in failure. To the great amusement of the congregation the poor fellow called out, in all earnestness, "It's a judgment; it's a judgment on me for leavin' my ain godly meetin'-house and comin' here to listen to a paper minister!"

But one minister at least resolved to avoid the very appearance of evil; for before beginning his sermon he closed the Bible, preached from a closed book, and covered up all paper, or papers, that might be within its boards. The little recorded of this minister is contained in the pungent quotation from his epitaph, which bears internal evidence of having caused its composer not a little trouble in the production. One stanza will suffice—

He preached off book to shun offence,  
And what was still more rare,  
He never spoke one word of sense—  
So preached Tammy Blair.

After the storm came the calm. Sermon reading

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slowly lost its terrors. People gradually realised that "paper" had its advantages; and that, after all, there was nothing to be alarmed about. Sermon reading formed the subject of conversation at dinner parties in the city, and the discussion of its advantages came to be regarded as one of the winter evening amusements in the village. There is a story told of a "character" who created much amusement one evening among the servants of a country manse by his imitations of the ministers in the locality. Wondering what was the cause of all the merriment in the kitchen, the mistress went downstairs, and, in her turn, was greatly amused by the farce that was going on. After listening awhile, she requested the favour of an imitation of her own husband's manner in the pulpit. "With pleasure, ma'am," said the humorist. "I can do him best of a'. Bring in a wee bit paper, an' I'll let ye *see how weel he reads his sermons.*"

At a dinner party in Edinburgh the subject of reading sermons came up as usual. One of the company remarked that if ministers who *read* would do it with more life and animation, the popular prejudice, which was beginning to give way, would soon give way altogether. The speaker added that he knew a country wife who, in spite of her dislike to the *paper*, was much attached to the preaching of a reading minister. On this seeming inconsistency being pointed out, she replied in her own defence, "A' very true; but then he has *pith* with his paper."

"That reminds me," said Dr. Chalmers, who was one of the dinner party, "of an old anecdote of my-

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self. A friend of mind, expressing his surprise to a country woman in Fife that she, who hated reading, should yet be so fond of Mr. Chalmers, she replied, with a serious shake of the head, 'Nae doubt, but it's *fell* readin' thon.'"

Of Dr. Norman Macleod a story is told much to the same effect. After service on one occasion in the country, two neighbours on the way home were engaged in discussing the sermon. "Did ever ye hear onything sae grand; wasna *that* a sermon?" asked one, full of admiration, and expecting a reply in the same strain. But the reply came only in the shape of a stolid stare. "Speak, woman: wisna that a sermon?" "Oh ay," said the demure one, "*but he read it.*" "Read it!" cried the other; "I widna care if *he had whustled it!*"

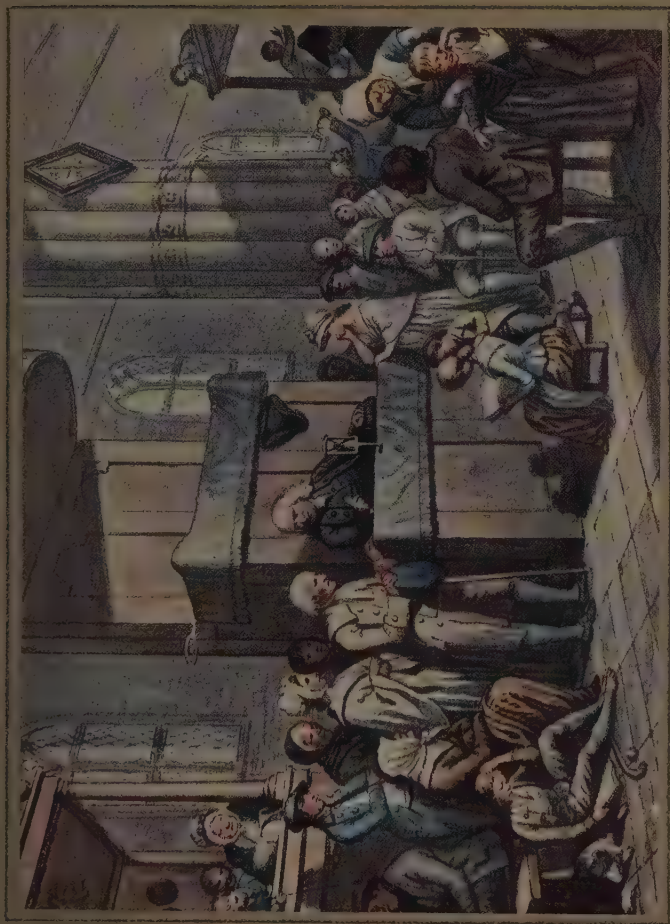
Thus the practice of reading sermons fairly set in, and the popular prejudice rapidly went out.

In Mrs. Oliphant's *Life of Edward Irving* there is an interesting account of his first service in Annan. The "haill toun," profoundly critical and much interested, turned out to hear him. When the sermon was in full current, some incautious movement of the preacher tilted over the great Bible and *the manuscript of the sermon which he was reading fell out*. Down the paper dropped, fluttering, and landing on the precensor's desk beneath. Here was an altogether unexpected incident. Every eye was fastened on the young preacher to see how he would act in the crisis.

But Irving was equal to the occasion. Calmly stopping his discourse for a moment, he leant over







CATECHISING IN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

By David Allan



## PATRONAGE, PRAYERS & SERMONS

the pulpit, grasped the manuscript as it lay before the precentor, crumpled it up in his great hand, thrust it into a pocket, resumed his sermon, and went on as fluently as before. That incident rendered Edward Irving's success as a preacher complete; to criticise a man so little put out by the loss of his "paper" would have been presumption indeed.

But to many ministers their manuscript was indispensable, as is evident from the case of a clergyman in Fife who had taken to "reading," and found he could not proceed with his sermon one Sunday morning, as he had left the manuscript on his study table at the manse. Explaining the matter to the congregation, he added, "Just open your Psalm Books, take the 119th Psalm, and the precentor will lead the singing till I come back from the manse. I'll not be five minutes."

In certain conditions of existence, five minutes may not seem a very long space of time. There are other circumstances, however, in which five minutes seem more like five hours. So it was with the congregation which commenced the 119th Psalm—the minister's five minutes were gone, and there was no appearance of his return. The precentor, poor man, was "aboot by w'it," as he afterwards confessed. The beadle, too, was becoming alarmed about his master's detention. Having had enough of the 119th, he left the church, and took his station at the vestry door to look for the minister and "that fashious paper." At last he appeared. "Come away, sir, come away," called the overjoyed official, "for we're a' at the last gasp, an' cheep-in' like a wheen deein' mice."



CHAPTER FOUR  
THE MINISTER



IMPORTANT AS ARE THE PUBLIC DUTIES of a Scotch minister, auld or modern, they yet cannot be considered as completing the circle of his professional work from week to week.

The minister must devote time to private study. Further he is not only a preacher, but he is a pastor, and has plenty of pastoral work to do. A visit from him in the cottage sometimes goes farther down than the most eloquent sermon in the pulpit. A special duty of the minister of a bygone day was the family visitation and catechising—a duty which has largely fallen into disuse in our day. As it is full of incident and humour, it is well worth notice here. Anything, indeed, about the auld Scotch minister that left out an account of his family catechising would be an incomplete sketch of his life and work.

At stated periods the minister arranged a systematic and thorough visitation of his parish, and sent round his beadle to notify where and when the catechising would take place. At these “diets of examination” a considerable deal of humour cropped up. Some ministers, as may easily be imagined, rendered the duty of catechising a much less formidable one than others. Dr. Russell, of Yarrow, tells us that his father never sought to puzzle his hearers. When Dr. Chalmers failed in getting a reply to any of his questions, he hastened to take all the blame upon himself, and then changed the form of the question so as to present what he wanted in a clearer light. Dr. Paul tells us of a friend who met an old

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servant while on a visit to the country, and on asking where she had been, she replied, "At ane o' Maister Morrison's exaemins." Asked what kind of examiner he was, Janet replied, "Oh, a terribel fine exaemer: spiers a hantle o' questions, an' answers them a' himsel'." Sometimes the catechising took place in a single out-of-the-way cottage—a lonely shieling on the edge of the moorland, with nobody but the forester, or the gamekeeper, and his family. At other times it was in a farm steading, with its kitchen filled for the great occasion—master, mistress, children, guests, servants, shepherds, ploughmen, all assembled for "the catecheesin'."

The catechising began by the minister tackling the head of the household on the Shorter Catechism. "What is the chief end of man, Maister Wilson?"

Not up to the mark in his "Carritch," Mr. Wilson skilfully parried the blow, and remarked with much humility, "'Deed, sir, it's no' for me to presume to answer sic a question as that. I fain would hear't frae yersel'."

A warm-hearted and obliging man, the minister explained "the chief end of man," and passed on to the rest of the family, whose seemed better up to their Catechism than "the maister." Taking up the Scripture history next, the minister yoked a ploughman and inquired in a general sort of way, "What kind of a man was Adam?"

"Ou, just like ither folk."

This reply, however, was not specific enough, and the minister intimated that he would like something

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more definite regarding the father of the human family.

"Weel, sir," said the ploughman, venturing on ground not very firm beneath his heavy tread—"weel, sir, Adam was geyan like Joe Simpson, the horse-couper."

"In what respect, James?"

"In this way : ye see, naeboddy got onything by him, an' mony lost."

This homely exposition may have had nothing of the teaching of the Church in it ; but it contained, instead, a distinct foretaste of modern criticism in its subjection of Scripture to the test of everyday life and literature.

Sitting by the fireside was a shepherd, and to him the minister applied for any remark he might have to make upon the Book of Job and its profoundly interesting problems of human life and suffering. "Job, I'm told, is your favourite study, William."

"Oh yes," replied the shepherd—a reflective man like the majority of his profession—"I've read, an' better read, the Book o' Job through dizzens o' times, I may say. There's nae doubt mony strange questions in't that no mortal man can fathom. Still an'on, there's some that are yet sae simple that the least bit laddie here could answer them."

"Ah!" replied the minister, delighted in having discovered one who had read, studied, and had something to say about the Patriarch of Uz. "I should like you to mention one of the questions to which you refer, William."

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"Weel, minister, Job asks, 'Is there ony taste in the white o' an egg?' There's little defeekulty in answerin' that question; for of a' the wairsh things in nature, it would kittle me to ken what is wairsher than the white o' an egg when there's nae saut on the table."

"The least bit laddie" referred to by the shepherd came in for his share of the minister's attention. After some remarks on the doctrine of regeneration, and the necessity for experiencing the new birth, the minister, believing that he had made the matter perfectly clear, turned to the little fellow and asked, "Now, Johnnie, would you like to be born again?"

"No," was the ready reply.

"And why not?" asked the minister.

"Because I'm feared I would be born a lassie!"

Probably Johnnie's reply suggested the next recipient of the minister's attention; for, turning to one of the maid-servants, he asked, in the scriptural sense, of course, "What is love, Marget?"

Marget, however, took it up, not in that sense at all, but in the one more familiar to her.

"Hout, minister," she said, "I wonder at ye spearin' sic a question as that. I'm sure ye ken as weel as me that love's just an unco fykinness o' the mind. What mair can onybody say about it than that?"

Having made no impression on the boy with regard to regeneration, and seeing Marget hopeless in regard to fuller information on the subject of love, the minister observed another boy in the company. Him he tackled on the Fifth Commandment, and its practi-

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cal issue on the subject of obedience to parents. "Now, do you always do what your father bids you?" asked the minister.

"Yes."

"That's a good boy. And your mother?"

"No."

"No!" asks the minister in astonishment. "How's that?"

"Because if I were to do a' she bids me, gor, she would keep me carryin' water a' day!"

Thus it was not all plain sailing for the minister. Frequently the tables were turned upon him, and he was subjected to an examination on his own ground. While visiting at a cottage in his parish of Loudon, Dr. Norman Macleod was desired by an auld wife to "gang owre the fundamentals," and satisfy her that he himself was all safe and sound. Not always did the minister come off successfully when he was the examined instead of the examiner. The Rev. Ralph Erskine on one occasion paid a visit to his brother Ebenezer at Abernethy.

"Oh, man," said the latter, "ye couldna hae come at a better time. I hae a diet o' examination this day, an' ye maun tak' it, as I hae matters o' life and death to settle at Perth."

"With all my heart," replied Ralph.

"Noo," said Ebenezer, "ye'll find a' my folk easy to examine but ane, an' him, I reckon, ye had better no' meddle wi'. He has an auld-fashioned wey o' answerin' a question by puttin' another, an' maybe he'll affront ye."

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"Affront me!" cried the indignant theologian. "Do you think he can foil me wi' my ain natural tools?"

"I'm only gie'n ye fair warnin'. Ye'd better no' ca' him up in yer catecheesin'."

The recusant referred to was one Walter Simpson, the parish blacksmith. When the parties were all assembled and the examination had begun, the minister resolved to tackle the blacksmith first.

"Tell me," said Mr. Erskine, "how lang Adam remained in a state of innocence."

"Just till he got a wife, sir," answered Walter. "But can ye tell me, minister, how lang he stood after that?"

Mr. Erskine could not reply, and Walter Simpson was asked to sit down.

The minister of St. Vigean's also met with a "closer" in one of his examinations at a fishing village while asking a question which no one seemed able to answer. Repeating the question, he paused for a reply, but all that he elicited was this from an old fisherman, "Weel, I canna exactly say; but can ye tell me, minister, how mony hooks it taks to bait a fifteen-score haddie line?"

There lives no record of reply: minister and fisherman had neutralised each other.

Always ready with an answer as Dr. Lawson was, he was yet on one occasion let gently down by a farmer at whose house he was catechising.

"Where is your other son?" asked the Doctor.

"He's out shootin' craws."

"And why does he shoot the crows?"

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"Because they destroy the grain."

"But the crows have as good a right to the grain as you."

"Maybe, Doctor; but they pay nae rent."

One may conclude from these pastoral visitations that the Scotch people of a generation or two ago were well read in the Scriptures, and possessed of at least an average share of intelligence from general reading and edifying conversation. "Most families," says Mr. Tait in his *Two Centuries of Border Church Life*, "had a few good books which were carefully and thoughtfully studied." At a diet of examination a woman once asked a question in a way that surprised the minister, and when asked, "How do you know that?" her reply was, "Ralph sayssae"—meaning that she had been reading, and reading to some purpose, the works of Ralph Erskine.

There is, however, another side to this story. Many ministers had a constant battle with ignorance, prejudice, and immorality. The only heartening that was got, now and again, was the consciousness that the battle was being fought in a good cause, and that the combatant on the right side would ultimately prevail. Before such a consummation was reached, however, it sometimes happened that the minister ran the risk of personal danger while seeking to carry out his plans of pastoral visitation. We have an illustration of this in the experience of the late Rev. Donald Sage, minister of Resolis, as narrated in the *Memoabilia Domestica*, edited by his son.

Mr. Sage was a man of great personal strength;

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and on more than one occasion he was compelled to use it against that opposition which the people presented in the face of ministerial efforts to benefit and reclaim them. "There was," says the editor of this interesting volume descriptive of social life in the north of Scotland, "a small proprietor in the parish who was known to be a libertine. Very much to the astonishment of his hearers, on one particular Sabbath, Mr. Sage, after divine service, intimated his intention to hold a diet of catechising at this man's house. His friends remonstrated with him. The man was, they said, such a desperate character, that it would neither be decent nor safe to hold any intercourse with him, and they evinced surprise that he should propose, even for the discharge of pastoral duties, to enter his house. The minister would go, however."

When he arrived at the house on the day appointed, the owner met him at the door, and with a menacing scowl asked what brought him there.

"I come to discharge my duties to God, to your conscience, and to my own," was the answer.

"I care nothing for any of the three," said the man. "Out of my house or—I'll turn you out."

"Easier said than done," replied the minister; "but turn me out if you can."

"This pithy colloquy brought matters to an issue," continues the editor. "They were both powerful men, and neither of them hesitated to put forth upon the other his ponderous strength. After a short but fierce struggle the minister became the victor, and the land-

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lord prostrate upon his own floor was, with a rope coiled round his arms and feet, bound over to keep the peace. The people of the district were then called in, and the minister proceeded seriously to discharge the duty of catechising them. When that was finished, he set himself to deal with the delinquents present. The man was solemnly rebuked, and the minister so moved his conscience that an arrangement was entered into, by which he and the woman with whom he cohabited should be duly and regularly married. The man afterwards became a decided Christian."

Another muscular Christian was the Rev. James Lapslie, minister of Campsie. He was a powerful and determined man. Further, during Chartist times he was a staunch supporter of the Government, and a pertinacious enemy of the black-nebs, as the friends of political reform were nicknamed. One evening when returning from a party he encountered a band of colliers who insulted him. One of them even swore that if it were not for Mr. Lapslie's black coat he would thrash him. Upon hearing this threat the minister at once threw his coat on the ground, saying, as he cast it from him—

"Lie you there, divinity. Here stands Jamie Lapslie."

Thereupon he set about his insulter and bestowed upon him a sound thrashing.

Such were some of the incidents and humours of the auld Scotch minister's family catechisings. Generally speaking, these were as acceptable to the people

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as they were educative and instructive in their character. Dr. Russell, of Yarrow, tells us that the Ettrick Shepherd was frequently among the catechised, and that Sir Walter Scott, though an Episcopalian, liked nothing better than these recurring services. Both were well up in their Scripture History.

The family catechisings were never regarded in the light of a private or personal visit from the minister; they were looked upon rather as a supplementary portion of his pulpit work, and as an effort to apply to family life the teaching of his public ministry.

The quiet family visit was something to look forward to before the minister came, and a something to remember after he had gone. Sometimes it was announced from the pulpit that such and such a district would be visited during the week. Sometimes it was not. But expected or not expected, the minister's visit, in the country at least, was generally regarded as a sort of standard date, round which, or from which, men and women calculated the outstanding events in their daily surroundings. At a farm in Dumfriesshire, on one occasion, the red cow calved on the day that the minister called, and the age of the calf was always reckoned from the date of the ministerial visit. Not only so, but when the calf attained to the dignity of cowhood, she was known in the herd as "the minister's coo."

Births (of a nobler nature than the one just intimated), marriages, partings, re-unions, times of sorrow and bereavement were all associated with the pastoral visit. There was no family "function" of

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any importance considered complete without the presence of the minister. When sickness or accident visited the household, the doctor was sent for ; but his visit never seemed complete without the minister supplementing it. When health was restored, the doctor said good-bye, but then came the time when the minister was more welcome than ever—for if he had come to mourn with those who mourned, he did not forget to call and rejoice with those who rejoiced. And yet the minister, like other folk, had to put up with “ little bits o’ touts an’ tiffs now an’ again.”

Calling one day at a cottage, the minister observed that the head of the family had aged very much since his last visit, and was hearing very imperfectly. After sitting awhile chatting with the auld wife, whose ears were all right, the minister rose to go, and promised that he would call again.

Now here comes in one of the failings of the minister, which makes him an ordinary human being like the rest of us ; he forgot all about his promise to call again. His failing found him out, however ; for meeting with the auld wife in the village one day, he stopped to inquire how Thomas was getting on.

“ Nane the better o’ you, Mr. Brown,” was the snell and unexpected reply.

“ How is that ? ” he asked.

“ Oh, just this—ye promised to ca’ an’ see Tammas very sune ; an’ ye’ll ken whether or no ye’ve keepit your promise.”

“ Yes, I’m sorry that I have been a little neglectful in this respect—very sorry, indeed ; but I heard now

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and again that Thomas was getting worse and worse in his hearing, until he now, I understand, is nearly deaf altogether ; and, I dare say, that put me off calling, since he could not hear anything that I might have to say."

" Just so, Mr. Brown ; *but the Lord's no' deaf*, an' can aye hear a bit prayer when it's offered."

Little rebuffs of this kind came occasionally in the minister's way. No doubt they were hard to bear ; but, in the long run, they did him good by putting experience into his life, and substance into his sermon. Into troubles of another kind he was often getting, just to keep him human. Sometimes he gave offence by declining proffered hospitality and taking nothing ; at other times he got into hot water by taking too much. While visiting in the country one day, Dr. Lawson called upon a worthy woman, who invited him to taste " a thimblefu' o' unco guid whisky." He declined, however, and learned afterwards that he had given great offence by doing so ; for on hearing that her minister was likely to call soon, she had sent expressly for the whisky. " An' after a'," as she remarked to a neighbour, " the Doctor never sae muckle as put it to his lips ! "

Another minister in the country got to the other extreme of hospitality. Arriving at a farmhouse, he was invited to partake of some refreshment, and as he had had a long walk, he gladly accepted the invitation. With great relish and appetite, he " walked into " the oatcakes, butter, cheese, and milk which the farmer's wife set before him. As he pegged away at







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the refreshment, the auld wife kept moving about at her household duties, but did not forget her guest while doing so. "Help yoursel' now. Pit out your han'. It maun be a long time syne yehad breakfast at the manse, and ye've had a lang walk. Pit out your han', now, and dinna be blate."

What hungry mortal could withstand such pressing as that! The minister helped himself so liberally that the auld wife's countenance began to fall as she cast a sidelong glance, now and again, at the lessening bulk of farm produce before the starving pastor. But she rose to the height of her conception of hospitality, and invited the minister still more warmly to make himself "at hame."

Poor man! Relying on the sincerity of the invitation, and judging that he was correctly interpreting human nature, he once more attacked the "farrells" of oatcakes, cheese, and milk in no half-hearted fashion. When the vacuum was filled and nature appeased, the minister gave a sigh of satisfaction, and exclaimed heartily, "Really, I must stop now. I've done exceedingly well."

"Na, na," cried the auld wife, under emotion too deep for tears. "Tak' another farrell, *an' that'll be four!*"

Strange death-beds the auld Scotch minister used to see sometimes—strange in this respect, that all his preaching and teaching seemed to have gone for nothing in cases here and there. Called to the bedside of one of his parishioners, the minister of Dalmailing found the patient more like a heathen than a Christian.

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After sincere and earnest prayer for the welfare of the dying man's soul, the minister sat down beside the patient and waited anxiously to see what turn matters might take, bodily or spiritually. At last the dying man spoke.

"The last clause of your petition, Doctor, was well put; and I think, too, it has been granted, for I am easier." Gratified to hear even this, the minister listened to what the patient was proceeding to say further. "I have no doubt, Doctor," he went on, "I have no doubt given much offence in the world, and oftenest when I meant to do good; but I have wilfully injured no man; and as God is my judge, and his goodness, you say, is so great, He may perhaps take my soul into His holy keeping."

Saying these words, and breathing this spirit, the patient dropped his head upon his breast, "and he was wafted away out of this world with as little trouble as a blameless baby."

Peaceful also was the death of an aged saint who had been a great reader in his day. As he lay on his death-bed the minister went regularly to see him, and delighted him much with the recitation of passages from the Paraphrases or some favourite author. At the close of the stanza—

Not in mine innocence I trust;  
I bow before thee in the dust.  
And through my Saviour's blood alone  
I look for mercy at thy throne—

the old man slightly raised his hands, as if in the act of prayer, feebly uttering some words, which were

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understood to be those of the first line of the quoted stanza, and then gently passed away from earth.

A minister from the North tells the following story of a notorious "cattle-lifter." Feeling that his "conveyancing" days were nearly over, and that he had only an hour or so to look behind him or before him, hesent for the minister. The message left at the manse was—"Come quick, quick, ta Donal'."

On reaching the shieling where the dying man lay, the minister sat down, and, after a few words of introductory sympathy, waited to give Donald an opportunity of getting anything off his mind. After an ominous silence, Donald at last opened his lips and said, "Chust say away yersel', sir."

Thus exhorted, and getting, as it were, a free hand, the minister reviewed the past, commented on the life the dying man had lived, and pointed how pardon and peace might even then be got. But the terrors of judgment had taken hold of Donald.

"Och, sir," he asked, "an' will the sheeps, an' the cows, an' the deers, and ilka thing Donal' has helped himsel' to, be waitin' for me at the Day o' Chudgment?"

"Undoubtedly they will be there in some form or other, unless you get them all removed by sincere repentance even now."

"An' will a' the shentlemans be there that Donal' didna chust ask about the sheeps, an' the cows, an' the deers?"

"Undoubtedly, unless——"

A strange light flashed out of the dying man's eyes, as if he had seen some other way than that suggested.

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"Then, minister," he said, and the saying contained his last words, "chust let ilka shentleman take back his ain sheeps, an' cows, an' deers, an' Donal' will be an honest man again."

When all was over the auld Scotch minister had aye the kindest sympathy to offer and the gentlest words to utter, to the sorrowing ones left behind. In *The Antiquary* we have the picture of a minister drawn from the life in such circumstances. "Nodivine," says Sir Walter, "was more attentive in visiting the sick and afflicted, in catechising the youth, and in reproving the erring." The minister thus described, the Rev. Mr. Blattergowl, goes to the fisherman's cottage on the day of Steenie Mucklebackit's funeral. What passed there, in his endeavour to convey consolation and sympathy, is about as touching a scene as is to be found between the first and the last pages of the Waverley novels. The bereaved and broken-hearted mother is listening to the minister; at each pause in his expression of sympathy she faintly answers, "Yes, sir, yes! Ye're very gude! Nae doot, nae doot! It's our duty to submit! But, oh dear, my poor Steenie! the pride o' my very heart, that was sae handsome an' comely, and a help to his family, an' a comfort to us a', and a pleasure to a' that looked on him! Oh, my bairn, my bairn. What for is thou lying there, and what for am I left to greet for ye?"

Of all the delightful social experiences in the country, one of the most delightful was a visit to the manse in the days to which these anecdotes and stories mainly refer. In saying this, no disparagement is in-

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tended of the manse of to-day. But this chapter deals with The Auld Scotch Minister rather than with his modern successor.

His parochial duties discharged, his sick folk visited, and his sermons all prepared, the minister was a man worth going far to see. His visitors were certain of a warm and cordial reception if he happened to be at home ; but the minister was much from home ; and he was far oftener entertained as a guest than allowed to act as a host. He never knew when he might be asked out to dinner, for the country gentleman riding homeward some afternoon often took a fancy to call at the manse and get the minister home with him to spend the long winter evening together.

An instance of this kind occurred in the case of the Laird of Stronvar calling at the manse of Balquhiddier to ask the minister to dine with him that same evening.

The door was opened by the minister's privileged old housekeeper, who was busy preparing dinner, and who saw that it would be "wasted" if her master was allowed to go. So she took the invitation into her own hand and diplomatically replied, "He cannadine wi' ye the day, Laird, as I hae just put his dinner to the fire ; but he will be very happy to dine wi' ye *the morn !*"

This frequent dining out kept the minister's cupboard a little barer than it would otherwise have been. "What's the use o' me laying muckle in," remarked a frugal old housekeeper to a country cadger, "when the minister's sae muckle out ?" Quite true. This may perhaps explain the state of the manse larder

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when Dr. Chalmers one day received a visit from two friends. Shortly after making their appearance, the minister retired to the kitchen to hold a private consultation with his housekeeper on the important article of dinner. To his dismay he found that there was nothing whatever in the manse but two separate parcels of dried fish. Having given directions that a portion of each should be cooked apart from the other, he rejoined his friends and proposed a walk till dinner-time.

On returning home with racy appetites, dinner was served—two large and most promising covered dishes flourishing at the head and foot of the table. “And now, gentlemen,” said the host, as the covers were removed, “you have variety to choose among. *That* is hard fish from St. Andrews, and *this* is hard fish from Dundee.”

Sometimes the minister was unable to carry out his ideas of hospitality from want of support on the part of his wife or housekeeper. In the next story, the minister seems to have had no support from his wife, which was worse—a hundred times worse. Her husband, poor fellow, was enjoying the company of a friend so much that he induced the latter to remain overnight in the manse. But he knew not the time of trial that was coming to him.

After a good supper the lady was asked by her husband to bring in the Family Bible for worship. On her retiring to perform this duty, the guest took the opportunity of slipping out to the lobby for the purpose of leaving his boots there. While stooping to place them below the table, the lady of the manse re-

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turned, and mistaking the guest for the husband, she gave his shining bald head a hearty whack with the sacred volume. Not only so, but she added insult to injury by saying in a matrimonial whisper, "There, take that for garrin' him stay a' nicht!"

When detained on church business by late meetings or otherwise, the minister of a former day delighted in taking home one or two friends with whom to enjoy the nice little supper that was certain to be ready at the manse. There he shone in social perfection; all that was worthy in him came out on such occasions, and any little failing took the same opportunity. There is a story told of Mr. Colston, of Penicuik, whose failing seems to have been the harmless one of "a gude conceit o' himsel'," and it always came out in this way. After supper, he used to call on his housekeeper and get her to propose a toast, and that toast was always the same—namely, "Here's to the star o' the Dalkeith Presbytery, and that's yersel', Mr. Colston."

Regarding another minister a story is told of the answer given by a countryman to a gentleman driving through the village in a gig. "My good man, where does the minister live?"

"In the manse, of coorse."

"Yes, I know, but where is the manse?"

"Among the trees yonder."

"Thanks. Your minister is much respected here, I understand?"

"Oh ay. Muckle respeckit in the pu'pit, but he's a dour deevil out o't."

Of another minister, who had mistaken his profes-

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sion, it is narrated that having emptied the church to which he had been appointed, this poor fellow applied for the vacant chaplaincy in the prison of Dunfermline. Obtaining the appointment, one of the members of the Prison Board remarked, with reference to the successful candidate, "Well, he managed to preach his kirk empty; let us hope he'll preach the prison empty too."

The auld Scotch minister grew old in years like other people, but he did not like growing old in spirit. The first indication of advancing age or failing strength on his part was noticed, not by himself, but by his kirk-session. Sometimes a deputation was appointed to wait on the minister; and as it was a very delicate errand on which they had come, the members of that deputation were specially instructed to broach the subject as gently and as judiciously as possible. For, long ago, the last idea to enter the minister's head was that he was getting old and needed assistance. Consequently, there were numerous instances in which he offered the stoutest opposition to any arrangement by which an assistant or colleague was proposed to be associated with him in carrying on the work which he had always been accustomed to do single handed.

A story to this effect comes from the south of Scotland, where the kirk-session, and the congregation too, ventured to suggest to their minister that as he had reached the threescore years and ten of the Psalmist, he "would be nane the waur o' a helper." But the minister refused to listen to any such suggestion;

## THE MINISTER IN DECLINING YEARS

and though the session did not press the matter any further at the time, they did not altogether lose sight of it.

Time wore on, and, though the minister was visibly failing, his resolution to remain unassisted in his pastoral and pulpit duties remained as strong as ever. The session, however, lost patience ; and a meeting of the congregation was called to consider what steps to take in the circumstances. The minister could not reasonably object to the meeting being called ; but meeting or no meeting, he was resolute in his determination to have no assistant—so resolute, indeed, that though physically unable to proceed to the meeting, he was conveyed thither *on a hand-barrow*. In presence of the assembled congregation, he told them all to witness that while he was not as firm on his legs as he used to be, he was clear as a bell in the head, and needed no assistance in preaching !

But the inevitable had, in the end, to be faced. After an assistant had been arranged for, the next anxiety was—the selection of the best man. In the circumstances here mentioned, the congregation of South College Street, U.P. Church, Edinburgh, were on the look out for a colleague to their minister, Dr. French. Some one happening to express the hope that the choice would fall on a popular man, the beadle, James Knox, observed, “ We dinna need to care about popularity here, as we’re aye a’ fu ! ” It is perhaps as well to state here that the worthy beadle’s meaning was simply this—Wanted : not so much a popular minister as one who can retain the popularity

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

which the church already enjoys, and who can continue to keep it well filled. The expression, it may be remarked in passing, is in pure Scotch, and worth preserving on that account.

The genius of Presbyterianism does not seem to act in harmony with two ministers in one sphere, or on one plane. Few "corners of the vineyard" are large enough to hold two ministers. An assistant might do as a temporary expedient, but a "colleague and successor" is a different matter. The auld Scotch minister, if we may judge from the stories illustrating this chapter, seldom, if ever, seems to have taken kindly to his colleague. When Mr. Patrick Booth was appointed colleague to Mr. Pate, of Innerleithen, in 1833, the latter used to take his seat in the pulpit on Sunday behind Mr. Booth, and when anything was said that did not please the auld minister, he entered his dissent by a cough that was meant to be something more than a cough.

When Dr. Mitchell, of Strathmore, got an assistant, or a colleague according to one authority, he seemed to think that the latter spent too much time in the preparation of his lecture for Sunday morning. On one occasion he tendered this suggestion—"Put down your heads, and depend upon your readiness to fill in what is needed during delivery. Take Peter's temptation, for example, and note simply these catch-words:—Peter—character—trusting to himself—always dangerous—here the cock crew." But the assistant was probably wise in preferring careful preparation to possible inspiration.

## THE MINISTER IN DECLINING YEARS

Perhaps the sorest point in connection with the appointment of a colleague was, in many instances at least, the giving up of the manse. How warmly the auld minister's memories clung round the home where he had lived so long; where, perhaps, he had brought his bride; where his children had all been born, and where he had spent the best of his lifetime. How he crooned over the tenses of the Latin verb indicating the etymology of the word *manse*: *maneo*, *mansum*; and coupled with them as an affectionate translation, the familiar words of the Psalmist—

This is my rest, here still I'll stay;  
For I do like it well.

This leaving the manse was sometimes the hardest part of the arrangement. Cases are on record where the minister point-blank refused to leave the old home during his lifetime. When age unfitted Mr. Comrie, of West Linton, for going in and out among his people as formerly, a colleague was appointed. After the matter of a retiring allowance had been settled, the session intimated to the minister that his successor was to get the manse. With this arrangement, however, Mr. Comrie stoutly refused to comply. "No, no," said he, "it's time enough to skin the auld horse when he's deid."

But the day came when the minister had—assistant or no assistant, colleague or no colleague—to meet his people for the last time and say farewell. In his *Annals of the Parish*, Galt narrates, with much tenderness, the farewell sermon of the minister of Dalmailing, who thus describes the occasion: "It

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was a moving discourse. There were few dry eyes in the kirk that day, for I had been with the aged from the beginning ; the young considered me as their natural pastor, and my bidding them all farewell was as when, of old among the heathen, an idol was taken away by the hands of the enemy."

At the close of the sermon the minister left the pulpit, all the elders standing on the stairs and gently assisting his descent. "The tear was in every eye," he continues, "and they helped me into the session-house, but I could not speak to them, nor they to me. In the churchyard all the congregation were assembled, young and old, and they made a lane for me to the back yett that opened into the manse garden. Some of them put out their hands and touched me as I passed away to be no more."

As the minister retired into private life, he found that the practical issue of all his teaching was looking him in the face and inquiring how he himself felt in the prospect of an exchange of realities. For the shadows of the unseen were lifted off, and one by one the strings that bound him to earth were being cut away. While a party of friends were visiting Dr. Davidson at Muirhouse, strolling through the grounds and admiring the beauty of the place, the old divine remarked that it would be a poor portion for one who had nothing else to look forward to when all enjoyment is over here.

Such thoughts seem to have been much in the mind of Dr. Chalmers during his last days. His biographer and son-in-law, Dr. Hanna, tells that, with all his

## THE AULD MINISTER : HIS PASSING

social cheerfulness, there were signs of much mental conflict, and even times of desolation, in the thought that "we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth as all our fathers were." But the shadows passed away, and under the sunshine that cheered him, the famous preacher used to say that disquietude should sit lightly on those who can fix their thoughts and affections on the realities of the future world.

Of these realities we learn something more from a simple remark or observation than from whole pages of recorded experience. When Mr. Kidston, of Stow, died, Dr. Lawson, of Selkirk, was asked to preach the funeral sermon, and he did so from the text: "Moses, my servant, is dead." Before the funeral, the Doctor expressed a wish to take a last look at the face of his old friend. As the cloth was removed by one of the family, Dr. Lawson gazed at the well-remembered features for a moment, dried away a falling tear, and then left the room, saying, "*Come away, James, I will see him again.*"

Scarcely less touching was the remark of an elder who, through age and infirmity, was unable to attend the funeral of his minister, Mr. Brown, of Craigdam. As the procession passed the door, the old man looked long and wistfully until it disappeared in the distance. As he re-entered the house he was heard to say, "He's awa' to the muntain o' spices, *and I shall soon follow him.*"

Full of pathos and full of hope are such expressions as these. Not only are they tender and affectionate tributes to the memory of the departed, but they con-

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tain, each in a single sentence, almost everything that has been revealed on the subject of the Great Hereafter. They touch, too, the secret springs in every human heart, and awaken in us all

"this fond desire,  
This longing after immortality."

CHAPTER FIVE  
THE PRECENTOR



## CHAPTER FIVE      THE PRECENTOR

IN OLDEN TIMES, LONG BEFORE THE Reformation in Scotland, the precentor, or lettergae, as he was always called then, was a person of considerable importance in the ecclesiastical world. Allan Ramsay, in one of his minor poems, tell us that

The lettergae of haly rhime  
Sat up at the boord head,  
And a' he said was thought a crime  
To contradict indeed.

And yet the precentor was a pleasant fellow to meet when professional care was off his mind, and when he was on the same platform as other and less distinguished men. He was social in his habits. Yet even in his moments of relaxation care came up his back, and he drew the line at singing auld ballants and daft sangs too near the day of his greatest professional appearance in public. His predecessor, the lettergae of an earlier day, however, seems to have lived in a freer atmosphere, if we judge from the reference to him in King James's *Christ's Kirk of the Green*—

Some who had been fou yestreen,  
Sic as the lettergae !

One of the most interesting chapters in the history of Scottish church music, or psalmody, is that which narrates the establishment of Sang Schules. These Sang Schules began well ; but after the Reformation they seem to have been conducted with little enthusiasm and less heart.

Dr. Mackintosh, in his *History of Civilisation in Scotland*, states that an Act was passed in 1579 with reference to the neglect that was even then beginning

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to appear in the instruction of the young in music and singing. Provosts and Councils throughout the country were enjoined to repair and "set agoing the Sang Schules," and to take such measures as would restore music and singing to their former popularity.

The cause of this want of interest in conducting the Sang Schules may be traced to various sources. Some time ago Mr. J. Cuthbert Hadden, of Edinburgh, in an interesting article on "The Past of Music in Scotland" (*Scottish Musical Monthly*), pointed out that when these useful institutions sank into oblivion, the music of the church lost its best and strongest support. Stating some of the reasons which may explain why the Sang Schules did not long survive the Reformation in Scotland, Mr. Hadden continued—

"The present metrical version of the Psalms, issued in 1650, was without tunes ; and the old variety of metre, necessitating a corresponding variety of music, was much limited in extent. The church itself, being indifferent to the musical element in its worship, the old Psalm-books with the music became increasingly scarce, and the fallacy—now, happily, almost extinct—laid hold of the Scottish mind that the quality of the musical material was of no consequence, so long as the heart was rightly exercised. Thus, the necessity for the instruction provided by the Sang Schules gradually passed away, and in less than a hundred years after the edict of King James, not one of these institutions remained."

Traces, but only traces, of the auld Sang Schules are to be found at Dunfermline, and apparently no-

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where else. There the precentor of the Parish Church enjoys the title of "Master of the Song," and draws a yearly salary from the Town Council of £8, 6s. 8d. as Teacher of Music in the Sang or Grammar School.

The teacher or master of the Sang Schules was the auld Scotch "Reader in the Kirk," the lettergae, or the precentor. With all their strong points of character the teachers seem to have been a difficult class to deal with. They were jealous of interference, and would brook no contradiction. Worse than all, the poor fellows were so badly paid that they lost heart, and when a singer loses heart he makes a poor mouth at either a song or a psalm. The Scottish people have always been musical ; therefore they bemoaned the misfortunes that every now and again befell the Sang Schules and the singing masters. The General Assembly took up the matter at its sitting in May 1713; it recommended to Presbyteries that they should appoint to Parish Schools such masters as could teach at least the common tunes, and that they should sing part of a psalm with their pupils every day. Three-and-thirty years later—namely, in 1746—we find the Assembly returning once more to the subject, for in one of the deliverances for that year, there is a strong recommendation to schoolmasters "to instruct the youth in singing the common tunes."

In these days, and for many a day thereafter, the schoolmaster and the precentor were one and the same person. If he had proved but a poor hand at teaching singing, it is clear that he made a still poorer hand at teaching reading. For gross darkness hovered over

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auld Scotland; and very few people could read, notwithstanding the fact that in every parish there was supposed to be a school, and the schoolmaster inside that school.

On Sundays at church the congregation were so ignorant that neither young nor old could follow the precentor unless he previously read out the psalm—line by line—before singing it. This practice was called “lining out,” or “reading the line”: and though it is almost always associated with the Scotch precentor, it is yet a remarkable fact that the practice did not originate in Scotland, but in England. In the year 1645 the Westminster Assembly passed a recommendation to the effect that “as many in our congregations cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do *read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof.*”

This recommendation was not only adopted in Scotland, but it was adopted with such fervid Scottish ardour that it soon became one of the most striking characteristics of the national psalmody, not only in public worship, but in private and family devotions.

At this stage, the meaning of the word *lettergae* comes before us in all its native simplicity. The man who let go the letters, who gaed out the lines of the psalm, before singing them to an unlettered congregation.

It may be noted here, too, that the precentor's desk was anciently called the Lectern or Letteran. When

## THE PRECENTOR LINING OUT

the liturgy was laid aside after the Reformation, the lettergae or Reader continued to read the Scriptures from the desk until the entrance of the minister, when the psalm-singing began, and continued until the preacher rose in the pulpit and commenced the sermon.

The practice of reading out the line before singing it, must have produced the effect of greatly lengthening the psalmody. But it seems to have been much relished by the congregation, as there appears no complaint on the ground of long service. Dr. Livingston, of Stair, an excellent authority, maintains that the old rate of psalm-singing was not slow, and that eight or ten stanzas was the portion given out by the minister—double what is usually prescribed in the present day.

But the length of time occupied in reading and singing the psalm was not grudged, for in these auld times, psalm-singing was the daily solace of the Scottish people.

The reading of the line was inseparably associated with the singing of it, and those who had been accustomed to the practice could not separate the two. An auld wife in Tarbolton, living alone, was in the habit of going through a daily portion of the psalms. Every line of that portion she first read, and then she crooned it over to the tune of "Coleshill."

From these incidents we get an explanation of the whole secret of how it was that the Scotch people kept so long to this practice. It was simply the fact that having become so much accustomed to "lining

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out," they could not think to give it up even though they could read the psalms as well as the schoolmaster or the precentor. It was only after much personal and popular excitement that the practice was, with some local exceptions, ultimately discontinued.

Much humour, conscious and unconscious, frequently crept in among the lines read out by the precentor, or his substitute. The schoolmaster, as precentor, would no doubt get through the performance quite creditably ; but as he frequently deputed some plain uneducated friend to take his place in the desk, one may easily imagine the delightful time the deputy would have in reading out the line, and the liberties he would take with the metrical version of the psalms. Thus it is told of one of these worthies that when he came to read out the following lines one Sunday morning—

Like pelican in wilderness  
Forsaken I have been—

He thus rendered them—

Like paitriks in a wild bird's nest  
For sure I've never seen.

Another rendering of the psalm—

The lions young may hungry be,  
And they may lack their food—

was given as

The lions young may hungry be,  
And they may lick their fud.

At an open-air service held in his parish of Yarrow, Dr. Russell on one occasion gave out the 17th Paraphrase to be sung. All went well until the lines were reached—

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Do justice to the friendless poor,  
And plead the widow's cause.

Here, however, Jamie Murray, who acted as precentor, put his foot in it by reading out—

Do justice to the *faitherless puir*,

but managed, nevertheless, to pull the tune through it all right.

During the incumbency of the Rev. Sir Henry Moncrieff, Bart., at Blackford, he one Sunday morning gave out a portion of the 71st Psalm, in which occurs the following stanza :—

To many I a wonder am,  
But thou'rt my refuge strong,  
Filled let my mouth be with thy praise,  
And honour all day long.

Reading the lines as usual, the precentor announced the fact—

To many I a wonder am,

but he got no further, for the risible faculties of the congregation were awakened by some incident unknown to the precentor, who failed to catch the tune after reading the line just quoted. He tried again, but with no better result, whereupon Sir Henry rose, and looking down to the desk, at once perceived the cause of the unwonted smiles on the faces of the congregation.

“So you are a wonder, John,” said the minister; “man, your wig's a-jee. Set it right, and try the psalm again.”

John adjusted his wig, repeated the line, caught up the tune, and proceeded without further adventure.

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One Sunday some members of a certain noble family in the west of Scotland were approaching the Communion tables in the Parish Church. Owing to the pressure and crowding on such occasions, the family referred to made little progress towards a seat, and but for the timely assistance of the precentor, might have been standing in the passage long enough. Looking over to the principal party causing the obstruction, the precentor called out, "Stand back, Jock, and let the Eggleton family in." Then turning to his book, he read, with much humour twinkling in his eye, the line, which derived an additional meaning out of the incident—

Nor stand in sinner's way.

On another occasion the scene was the same as the last—a Communion Sunday, with its unseemly crowding into "the table seats." Irritated by the noise and confusion the minister lost his temper, sharply rebuked the congregation, and desired the precentor to sing another verse of the psalm. Annoyed in his turn by the peremptory tone in which the minister had ordered an additional four lines, the precentor proceeded with his reading and singing—

He will not chide continually,  
Nor keep His anger still.  
With us He dealt not as we sinn'd,  
Nor did requite our ill.

The first two lines were read with so much emphasis that the congregation caught up the spirit of the precentor, and sang them with such "birr and go" that the minister learned the lesson which both precentor and congregation wished to teach him.

## THE PRECENTOR AND HIS TUNES

Reading the lines seems to have been the frequent cause of setting young and inexperienced precentors off the tune they had selected for the psalm given out by the minister. A young man who "took the desk for a day" failed to catch up the tune after reading the line. He read it again, but the tune would not follow. Once more he tackled it—

Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way,  
but with a similar result.

An old farmer sitting below the desk, and affected by the repeated failures of its young occupant, blurted out, "Od, laddie, I'm thinkin' the Lord has muckle need to teach ye."

As education began to make its influence felt, and as people became in a great measure able to read for themselves, the necessity for the precentor reading the lines grew less and less apparent. Accordingly, signs of change began to show themselves, and a desire for dropping the line-reading set in. This desire, however, was by no means universal. Dreading any such change in the familiar custom, an old lady in Peebles was so concerned about the continuance of the practice that she offered to leave the whole of her personal estate to the kirk-session on condition that the precentor would be allowed to continue reading the lines before singing them.

In his *Two Centuries of Border Church Life*, Mr. Tait tells us that in 1807 the first indication of dropping the line came in the shape of a petition to the kirk-session of a certain congregation, setting forth that several members were "not satisfied with reading the

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line before singing the psalms in public worship, and desiring the advice of the Session thereanent."

Consideration of this petition was deferred, but the Minutes bear that the Session could not see their way to do anything in the matter. Three years later, the matter again came up for consideration, but from the same Minutes we learn that considerable commotion had been caused by the proposed abolition of line-reading. Sympathising with the movement, the Session yet judged it inexpedient to make any change, conceiving that should they do so "it would rather promote strife than godly edifying."

With the tenacity characterising the Border people, the question was raised once more six years later, but only met with the same caution and consideration that it had previously received. That it ultimately succeeded, however, is proved by the Minutes of 1824, in which year the practice of reading the line was given up, in that congregation at least.

As if to show, however, the firm hold that the primitive practice had got upon the members of that particular congregation, one worthy woman opposed the proposed innovation to the very last. When she found that the day had gone against her, she intimated to the kirk-session that she had got the better of them "after a'." Instead of singing in the church, she kept mind of the psalms that had been given out, and on returning home, commenced to read the lines, and sing them in the old orthodox fashion, none daring to make her afraid.

Dr. Balfour, a popular minister in Glasgow at the

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beginning of the present century, one day met a member of his congregation—an old lady. Inquiring after her health, she replied that she was “unco weel in body, but sair troubled in mind.”

“And what may that trouble be?” kindly asked the Doctor.

“Jist this—I canna get owre the precentor no’ gien out the line!”

“Small trouble that, Janet. How does that happen to put you so much about?”

“Oh, Doctor, jist in this way. I aye like to gust my gab twice wi’ the guid an’ godly lines—yince in the readin’ an’ yince in the singin’—that’s twice, ye ken.”

The next time Dr. Balfour met this worthy member she had, curiously enough, another grievance troubling her. This time it was again with the precentor and his on-goings.

“What’s wrong now, Janet?”

“Oh, it’s thae *repeatin’ tunes*, as they ca’ them. I canna thole the lines sung twice owre.”

“What!” cried the Doctor, in affected amazement. “Ye canna thole the lines o’ David’s Psalms being sung twice owre? Why, the very last time I met you, you said that you liked to gust your gab twice wi’ the guid and godly lines!”

Talking over the matter of abolishing the practice, Dr. Chalmers used to tell the story of an old member of his congregation who opposed the movement on scriptural grounds. Asked to state her authority, she at once replied by asking, “What says Isaiah,

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Doctor? 'Line upon line, line upon line: here a little, and there a little.'"

A sore question this attempt to give up the old and time-honoured custom of reading the line. It seemed to have produced almost as much genuine grief and honest heart-burning as did the introduction of the organ in these degenerate modern days. The famous Scottish vocalist, John Wilson, on one occasion spent a Saturday evening with a friend at the manse of Old Kilpatrick. Before parting for the night it was arranged that Mr. Wilson should occupy the precentor's desk next day.

In giving out the psalm the minister prefaced it, as was his custom, with a running commentary extending over several minutes in duration. As the commentary proceeded, lengthened out and repeated *ad nauseam*, Mr. Wilson never imagined for one moment that he would be expected to read the line in such circumstances. "No, no," he said to himself, "I'll go right through the psalm and read no line."

The service of praise commenced, but the consternation depicted on every countenance was soon apparent. One old, hard-faced member, sitting directly in front of the offending precentor, looked up every now and again with an expression that seemed to intimate that he would have something to say to the daring innovator when he got the opportunity.

The opportunity soon came. As Mr. Wilson was walking towards the manse after service, the hard-faced liner-out approached.

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"Sir," said he, jerking backward with his thumb, "are ye gaun up yonder in the afternoon?"

"Yes, I intend so."

"Then, sir, ye maun read the line—nane o' your Edinburgh tricks here!"

The Rev. Mr. Stark, of Forres, gifted with a fine ear for music, was always much put out and irritated by the precentor reading the lines. Accordingly, we find him among those who wished to abolish the practice. Preaching one Sunday where it still prevailed, Mr. Stark instructed the precentor, before going up to the desk, to omit reading the lines, and if offence were given he would undertake the responsibility.

The precentor had not proceeded far into the first verse of the psalm when several members of the congregation shut their Bibles with a sharp snap that unmistakably conveyed their deep displeasure at the innovation.

Observing that offence had indeed been given and taken, Mr. Stark made the following explanation before proceeding with the singing of the second psalm: "My friends," he said, "the practice of reading the line by the precentor originated in bygone days when few people could read. But now it is supposed that everybody can read, and therefore the practice is now no longer necessary. I observe, however, that it is necessary to be continued here, if I may judge by the manifest displeasure shown when the first psalm was sung in the new and better way. But don't blame your precentor for this; blame me. In this second

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psalm, return to your old plan, and much good may it do you."

During the first half of last century Scottish Psalmody seems to have reached its lowest point—to have crooned down to its lowest key. The Sang Schules had all gone out of date and sung their last psalm; the power to read music at sight had declined or become one of the lost arts; and the psalm tunes had shrunk in number down to a bare and solitary dozen. But these twelve tunes kept their hold of the Scottish people, and the Scottish people kept their hold of them—afraid, apparently, of further shrinkage, and possible extinction altogether. Gradually the twelve tunes came to be associated with certain psalms, and with these certain psalms only. It would have been accounted sacrilege to sing the 121st—

I to the hills will lift mine eyes  
From whence doth come mine aid,  
to another tune than "French"; or the 11th—  
I in the Lord do put my trust,  
How is it then that ye . . . -  
to anything else than "Coleshill."

Dr. Guthrie, in his *Autobiography*, tells of an old domestic in his family who would use no Paraphrases, would look at no Hymns, and who would sing "the Psalms o' Dauvit only to the tunes o' Dauvit, an' nae-thing else."

A precentor in Coull, Aberdeenshire, sang all the psalms of the service one Sunday to one tune—Bangor. One of the congregation on his way home innocently remarked, "Ye were great on Bangor the day, Sandy."

## THE PRECENTOR & NEW TUNES

"Be't Bangor, be't Dangor," snappishly replied Sandy, "ye've got a weel-sustained tune, an' hae nae occasion to compleen—let me tell ye."

One day the precentor in a church at Leith attempted to introduce this same "Bangor," a tune which was not included in the authorised and standard twelve. Scarcely had he begun to "skirl up" when the officiating minister, father of the late Dr. Fletcher, of London, arose in wrath, and, taking the great pulpit Bible in both hands, came down with a tremendous whack on the innocent and unsuspecting head of the bold precentor, and dared him to ever start "sic a tune as that in this kirk again."

Here there seemed to be small encouragement in the matter of introducing new tunes. It was no light affair for a precentor to get the big Bible thrown at his head in presence of the congregation—let alone the shock to a system that was generally nervous, and to a temperament that could stand no contradiction. More likely were the twelve tunes to decrease in number than to increase, since the penalty attached to the introduction of any new tune was so direct and forcible in its application. "At a time not far remote," says the Rev. Andrew Duncan in the *Scottish Sanctuary*, "the introduction of a new tune was apt to give offence to the older people. . . .

"I remember being told that on one occasion the precentor in the congregation, with which I am connected, having in the forenoon sung a tune then recently composed, the elders were so highly displeased that they determined he should be kept out of the

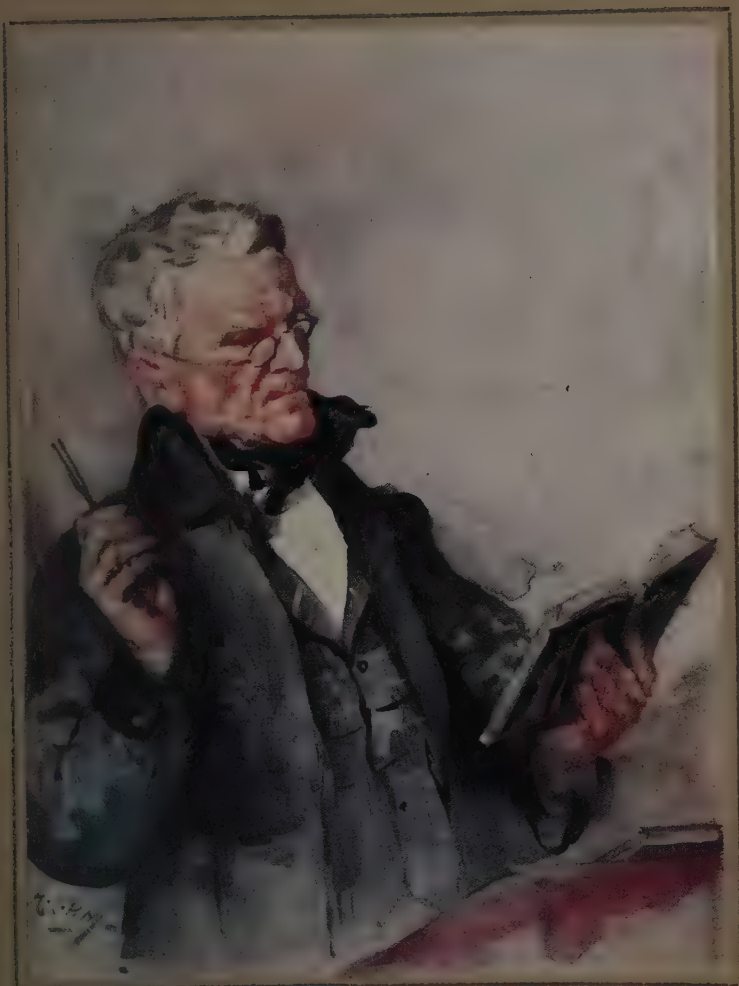
## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

desk in the afternoon, and one of themselves should take his place. The gravest of these seniors accordingly went into the desk, and with the view perhaps of counteracting as much as possible the evil that had been done, or of exhibiting a most emphatic testimony against it, he chose a very old and venerable tune to begin with ; but being one that had been out of use for a generation or more, it was known to few or none of the people, and not only so, but he seemed to have forgotten it himself, and after some painful and unsuccessful attempts to proceed would have stuck altogether, had not the displaced and disgraced precentor generously come to his aid."

After all these experiences we, at this time of day, can scarcely wonder at the small stock of tunes with which the auld Scotch precentor provided himself. The author of *James Tacket: A Humorous Tale of Scottish Life*, tells us that forty years ago the precentor in his parish could sing only one tune, and that was "Stilt," or "York," by which name it was more generally known. When this precentor employed James Skrake, as substitute, James had two, and these were "Coleshill" and "Old Hundred." With this modest collection, the substitute, nevertheless, got into difficulties ; for one day the minister gave out the Hundredth Psalm to be sung, but James unfortunately found himself among the bars of "Coleshill." After some unproductive and inharmonious skirmishing, the minister, with the best intentions, suggested the second version of the psalm, whereupon James, to the utter astonishment of himself and every-







THE PRECENTOR

By H. C. Preston Macgoun, R.S.W.



## THE PRECENTOR & NEW TUNES

body listening, produced the genuine "Old Hundred" when it was no longer wanted !

With a similar limited scale of tunes comes the next precentor, who also got into difficulties one Sunday morning over the minister's giving out a psalm of peculiar metre—148th—second version.

The Lord of Heaven confess,  
On high his glory raise,  
Him let all angels bless,  
Him all his armies praise.  
Him glorify  
Sun, moon, and stars,  
Ye higher spheres,  
And cloudy sky.

Nothing abashed, the precentor manfully attacked the peculiar metre with a long measure tune. Making little progress, naturally, he stopped, and, looking up to the minister, exclaimed in indignant tones, "If ye're gaun tae gie oot psalms o' that kind, ye maun sing them yersel'. Gie's the 'Auld Hunder'!"

These peculiar metres must have presented trials of no common kind to the precentor whose stock of tunes was on the limited scale. While some got over the difficulty of mastering the "Peculiars," and while some collapsed under their intricacies, there yet were other precentors who showed their ingenuity in surmounting such trifling obstacles as these. When Dr. Anderson, of Newburgh, Fife, one day gave out a peculiar metre psalm, the precentor, a man of rare resource and presence of mind, instead of attacking it and making a mess of it, passed over the peculiar psalm and took the next one. At the close of the

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service this ingenious man looked in at the vestry and remarked, "Ye thocht ye had me yonder, Doctor ; but I was ready for ye, for the next psalm was just as guid as the ane ye gied oot."

In the Congregational Church at Helensburgh the precentor had a collection of six tunes. With this brave half-dozen he attacked and conquered all the measures—peculiar, long, or common—a feat of which modern singers might justly be envious.

The limited powers of the precentor were once illustrated by a request made by the precentor himself. A minister from the south, while on a visit to Ballachulish, had agreed to preach in the Parish Church. Before the service began, he received a visit from the precentor, who thus addressed him : " Please, sir, I can only sing twa tunes, an' ye mauna gie me three psalms."

With such men as these filling the desks of former days, and facing the congregation without fear or reproach, it is not difficult to form some estimate of the character of these precentors, and the spirit which animated them. If the old precentor had only six tunes, he had all the greater confidence in singing these six tunes. He could adapt them to any psalm, and feared neither long measure nor peculiar metre. In the precenting world he was a kind of Sir William of Deloraine—

Alike to him was time or tide,  
December's snow or July's pride ;  
Alike to him was tide or time, .  
Moonless midnight, or matin prime—

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a kind of "Gibbie-Gae-through-wi't" that stuck at nothing, like the sodger at the ghost.

If the auld precentor was ignorant and conceited, it was just because his ignorance and conceit were in inverse proportion to his knowledge of music and metre. Had he known more of the latter he certainly would have displayed less of the former. It was an old remark in praise of a precentor that "he had a voice that filled the kirk." Filling the kirk also filled himself with a sense of his own importance, and it was not in human nature to resist the effects of the process. In his own judgment, he was an authority in the musical world ; and it was a species of treason to question that authority.

If not the village schoolmaster, the precentor was frequently the village shoemaker, or the grocer. A limited range of empire was his during the week, but on Sunday morning he rose to the full height of his great position and responsibility. He asserted his position in such a manner as to place himself but little lower than the minister. He regarded the desk as the complement of the pulpit—the one incomplete without the other. "It's aye the way, Doctor," remarked a precentor, giving expression to the sentiments just stated, "it's aye the way ; when folk ken ye are to preach, and I'm to precent, there's a fu' kirk to listen to psalm an' sermon." Dr. Blair used to tell, with great glee, the following story of his precentor. Happening to preach from home one Sunday the Doctor on his return next day met the precentor and inquired, "Well, John, how did matters get on

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during my absence yesterday?" "'Deed," was the reply, "I daursay no very weel; I wasna there, Doctor, ony mair than yoursel'."

It is to be hoped that John made provision for his absence in the desk, for the non-appearance of a precentor was a serious affair—an event that occurred very rarely in the annals of any congregation. Such a thing has happened, however, as in the following instance. The precentor in a country church had taken suddenly ill, and had been unable either to inform the minister or provide a substitute. The minister gave out the psalm as usual, and then invited any one of the congregation to raise the tune. But no one ventured. "*Will no one raise the tune?*" asked the minister in despair. "Can nobody sing?" Upon this appeal, a half-witted character in the gallery called out, "There's Andra Cam'll doon there; I dinna ken whether he can sing or no", but he's the best whistler that ever cocked a lip."

Sometimes it has happened that the minister himself has not turned up at church; but that was a poor and secondary affair compared with the non-appearance of the precentor. There is an amusing scene in Mr. Barrie's *Little Minister*, where Mr. Dishart fails to put in an appearance. Some one suggested that the precentor should go up to his desk and give out a psalm until the minister arrived; but that official was horrified at the very thought. "Would a psalm sung wi' sic an object mount higher, think you, than a bairn's kite. I'll insult the Almighty to screen no minister!" This scene in the session-house is admirably true to life.

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The auld precentor had many peculiarities in the desk. He used to make faces, stand on tiptoe for high notes, and run the end of one word into the beginning of the next. "He pitched the lines haphazard," observes Mr. Curwen, "and nearly always had them too high. But in his own judgment he was a light of the musical world; and he resented, with the self-possession of a veteran, any attempt to interfere with tradition."

A precentor in the country, when unable to get up among the high notes of his tune, used to hold his finger on high, and get the top-note vocalists of the congregation to ascend to the desired altitude, and find their way down again as best they could.

Seldom was the auld precentor put out, because his plentiful stock of confidence kept him always in. While the minister of a Parish Church in the North was giving out the first psalm the precentor kept humming away at the tune he had selected for that psalm. When the minister sat down the precentor rose, but his mental machinery got out of gear and threw him into the notes of a tune the measure of which did not suit the psalm. In perfect self-possession he stopped, looked calmly round the congregation, and observed, "Friends, I'm wrang—let's try again." Making a new effort he succeeded in catching the tune, and off he went as fresh as paint. Another in similar circumstances remarked, as he came down from a high pitch, "It'll no dae, chaps—try a wee thocht laicher." Sometimes, however, the precentor came off only second best, notwithstanding all his confidence. It must have

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been a "peculiar measure" that a stranger minister selected one Sunday morning, for when the precentor tackled it, and turned it over in every possible way, he gave it up, and exclaimed, "That beats a'—the psalm'll no sing—confound it!"

It was not often that the regular old precentor lost his presence of mind in the desk on Sundays, and went down the stair in grief and humiliation. There are instances, however, of such disaster. It was to the younger members of the profession, to candidates and substitutes, that the day of breakdown mostly came. To young and inexperienced men, the ordeal of facing a large congregation must have been a trial of no common kind. Various were the remedies proposed for the cure of nervousness. Relating his trials on this head, a young precentor received the following prescription from an old precenting hand: "Yes, yes, I was very nervous tae, when a young fellow like you, but I found out a cure so confoundedly simple that I stick to it yet. I just put a few coppers in the pouch o' my Sunday trousers, and whenever the shakiness cam' on, I gaed the coppers a bit rattle, and the sound cheered me, and made me feel sae independent like, that I got through ony psalm the minister liked to gae out."

Dr. Rodgers relates an anecdote in connection with the candidature of a young man for the vacant precentorship in the Abbey Church of Dunfermline. Ascending to the desk the candidate, like the subject of the foregoing sketch, anxiously waited the announcement of the psalm. When that was done, however,

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his courage failed and melted away. The singing point could not be reached ; not a note found utterance.

Unable to endure the mortification of defeat, the candidate darted from the desk, left the church, disappeared from the neighbourhood, and was afterwards known in local history as the lost precentor ! After the lapse of fifty years, the runaway returned to Dunfermline, but not to remount the precentor's desk. He had gone abroad, amassed a fortune, and had now resolved to settle down in retirement as Lieutenant-Colonel Lindsay, of the Honourable East India Company's service.

David Kennedy, the famous Scottish vocalist, when a young man, " passed through the whins " one Sunday morning at the desk. His first appearance as a precentor was made in a small country kirk, and the first tune chosen was " French "—a melody familiar to him from earliest years. On rising to lead the psalmody, the nervousness that had characterised his childhood returned on that memorable Sunday morning, and so affected him that he could remember no more than two lines of the tune ; but to these two lines he sang the whole of the psalm !

Another young precentor fared still worse. On the Sunday morning when he was appointed to occupy the desk, he made a fairly good start with the first psalm, but utterly broke down at the second. As he was unable to hitch it on to any tune, the minister rose and intimated, not without much sympathy in tone, although apparently wanting in words. " My friends,"

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said he, addressing the congregation, "the case is hopeless—let us pray."

Here there seems to have been no attempt on the part of the minister to assist the broken-down precentor. But there are instances in which such a thing has been done, and done successfully. The Rev. Mr. Hislop, of Doune Free Church, on one occasion got his precentor out of a difficulty by a little helpful sympathy. Looking over the pulpit, Mr. Hislop whispered, "Try another tune, John: try another, man." John tried, and went through the psalm all right.

Dr. Guthrie, in his *Autobiography*, relates the following interesting story of his precentor: "I had undertaken," he says, "to preach on a Sunday evening in St. George's Church for a benevolent society, and, as it was my first public sermon, I went with some measure of anxiety to the church. It was full to the door. Whether the presence of such a large place and fashionable congregation was too much for the precentor, I know not, but he went quite out of the tune. He tried another, but with no better success. With pale face and quivering voice, the poor fellow tried a third; but, if ever on, he was soon off the rails. He was now trembling all over. People in the pews were hanging down their heads, and I was left sitting in the pulpit in vexation and a pretty pother. If this was to go on, what was to come of my sermon, and the collection for the Destitute Old Women's Society? I rose, and proceeding with the order of service as if nothing had occurred, said, 'Let us pray'—relieving all from a most awkward predicament, and leaving

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the precentor time to gather up his scattered senses and conduct the rest of the psalmody very well. Never was any man more grateful—he could hardly have been more so, though I had plucked him out of the sea. When I was unrobing in the vestry he came up to me, saying, ‘How much I was obliged to you for the way you saved me to-night, Mr. Guthrie!’ ‘Ah, friend,’ I replied, ‘I fancy I did more for you than you could in such circumstances have done for me. Had I stuck in my sermon, would you have started up to relieve me by saying, “Let us sing”?’”

Probably not: but there were other ways in which the precentor has been known to help the minister than by merely going on with the singing. George Jenkins, of Dr. Frew’s Church, St. Ninian’s, was not only a fine leader of praise, but he was a man “mighty in the Scriptures” as well. One Sunday morning a stranger occupying the pulpit was obliged to confess that he could not recollect “the place” from which he had chosen his text. The words, however, the minister added, are these, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

“That’s Philippians first, and twenty-first, sir,” cried the precentor below, whereupon the preacher thanked him, and proceeded with his sermon.

Sometimes the precentor himself needed help, or at least got it, whether needed or not. A well-known Ayrshire “character,” Will Speir, chanced to visit Dalry where his brother Robert was precentor of the Parish Church. Will was weak in the head; and when in Dalry he lodged with two personages, Souple San-

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nie and Rab Park, who were similarly affected. One Sunday the three intellectuals attended the Parish Church, where Will joined in the music so lustily that no other voice than his own could be heard in his vicinity. Rab Park did his best also; but not to the satisfaction of Will; for the latter at length cried out, "Rab Park, sing man, sing! D'ye no' ken the haill burden o' the Psalms lies on you an' me, an' oor Rab." A somewhat awkward incident occurred at the close of a deeply solemn sermon by Dr. Robertson of Irvine, on the subject of The Great White Throne. The preacher, having finished his discourse, gave out the paraphrase ending—

O may we stand before the Lamb,  
When earth and seas are fled,  
And hear the Judge pronounce our name,  
With blessings on our head!

The precentor sang it to the tune "Desert." Dr. Robertson, as soon as he recognised the tune, saw its incongruity, and groaning in spirit murmured, "My sermon's murdered!"

There is many a kindly word of sympathy uttered in the vestry between minister and precentor both before and after service. Here is a touching story from the Border country.

"I hope you are in good trim to-day, John," said the minister of an upland parish, stretching southward to the Cheviots, one Sunday morning while he was handing the precentor the psalms and paraphrases for the day.

"I thank ye kindly," replied the old precentor—one who was everywhere revered and esteemed for his

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many excellent traits of character ; one who had come through much family trial and sorrow. " I think I'll manage to pu' through. Maybe the last on the list'll put me about a wee, for I see it's Paraphrase Forty—a paraphrase that aye creeps near my heart an' the wife's."

" Yes," replied the minister, " I've chosen the 40th Paraphrase to illustrate the subject of lecture this forenoon—the parable of the Prodigal Son."

" God help me ! " the old man was heard to say as he left the vestry to take his place in the precentor's desk. Seated there on that warm Sunday morning in July, his eye wandered over the gathering congregation, and sought, through the open windows of the church, the windings of the public road along the brae on which lies the border village of this affecting incident.

All went well with the service. The lecture on the Prodigal Son seemed greatly to affect the old precentor, who had been set, apparently, at thinking on *his* prodigal son. The lecture over, the last prayer expressed, the closing paraphrase was announced and read over, as was the minister's custom, from beginning to end.

I'll go, and with a mourning voice,  
Fall down before his face :  
Father ! I've sinned 'gainst Heaven and thee,  
Nor can deserve thy grace.  
He said, and hasten'd to his home,  
To seek his father's love :  
The father sees him from afar,  
And——

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At that the old precentor started up from his seat in the desk. With a strange light in the fine blue eyes of that reverent face, he pointed in the direction of the open window, commanding a view of the public road on the hillside, and cried out, "*Yonder's Jamie!*"

The voice of nature was so strong that it overcame the voice of propriety and situation—so strong, indeed, was it that when the old man uttered that cry, he fell back in the desk and expired.

The congregation were at once dismissed, and the precentor's desk remained for a long time empty. The successor of the old man for some months refused to enter it, but took his place on the platform, where the minister used to administer the sacrament and baptize the children of the congregation.

Sometimes the critical remarks in the vestry took an unfavourable turn, both in presence and the absence of the precentor. One Sunday, a minister ventured to make some observations on the psalmody of that morning. "Ay, ay," replied the elder to whom these had been addressed, "John's singin's like your preachin'—real monotonous."

In the following anecdote the minister once more comes off only second best in a critical encounter with the precentor himself. Referring to the singing of eight verses of one of the psalms given out, the minister remarked: "You allowed the pitch to fall very flat toward the finish." "Ay," replied the precentor, "baith psalm an' sermon were alike in that respect."

The foregoing story records a verbal victory for the man of music; but sometimes he had the worst of it.

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One minister did not approve of his precentor's singing, considering it much too loud. For a time he suffered in silence; but one morning the precentor started off with even more vehemence than usual. This was more than the minister could stand. He rose up in the pulpit, and leaning over tapped the offender on the head, saying, "Andra, Andra, man, dost thou no' ken that a toom barrel aye sounds loudest?"

A clerical rebuke for too powerful singing was also administered upon one occasion in the Kirk at Auchenchervies. Rory O'More, the village blacksmith, was one of the loudest singers in the choir. He was proud of his voice; and to show it off to full advantage he would vary his style from bass to alto, and from alto to treble, in the same hymn. The minister had long observed that Rory's methods were upsetting the general harmony of the congregation's singing, and at length he resolved to bring the culprit to book. "Hymn thirty-four," he announced, "and a' thegither! And, Mr. O'More, if ye're to sing tenor, sing tenor. Or if ye're to sing bass, sing bass. But we'll hae nae mair o' yer shandygaff."

From the foregoing sketches of character and incidents in the life and experience of the auld Scotch precentor, one gathers abundance of internal evidence that the old-time psalmody was no great treat. But it may be well to support that evidence by one or two anecdotes of contemporary criticism.

In a Highland parish where the singing was none of the sweetest, an old lady went to church one Sunday with the family, whose guest she happened to be for

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a week or two. The first two psalms were allowed to pass without remark, but the third came in for the following critical observation :—

“ Dear me ! ” whispered the visitor to a niece sitting next her, “ what kind o’ singin’ do ye ca’ that ? ”

“ Oh, that’s just our precentor’s ordinary,” replied the girl quite complacently.

“ Weel, weel, if the Almichty’s pleased wi’ *that*, He’s easy pleased indeed, an’ has but little lug for music.”

In another northern parish, the precentor took heart of grace one Sunday morning and ventured on the hazardous experiment of trying a new tune.

“ Whatna tune was that ye had the day ? ” inquired one of the elders after the service.

“ Oh, yon was *St. Paul’s*,” replied the precentor.

“ Saunt what ? ”

“ St. Paul’s.”

“ Ye may be very thankfu’ Paul himsel’ wasna in the kirk to hear ye, for if he had, he would hae bundled ye oot o’ the desk quick. Paul was a man that couldna, an’ what’s mair he wouldna, stand the like o’ yon. Dinna affront his memory by singin’ the like o’ yon tune again.”

Of another minister the following anecdote is told : Singing very badly one morning, as if suffering from a severe cold, the precentor felt a tap on the head from the minister. “ What’s the matter, John ? Wat’s wrang wi’ ye the day ? ”

“ It’s an uncokittlin’ in the paupo’ the hass, minister.”

“ An uncokittlin’, d’ye ca’t ! It sounds mair like an auld tam cat ! ”

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Anecdotes like these remind us that long ago there seemed to be frequent interchanges and expression of opinion between pulpit and desk during the time of public worship. They point to a period of patriarchal simplicity—refreshing to us who hear so much of the cleavage that is said to be widening and separating pulpit and pew in our day.

On one occasion while a minister in Aberdeenshire was speaking of the tie that keeps pastor and flock together, he used the following familiar illustration: "My brethren," he said, "supposing me to be the shepherd, an' you to be the sheep, an' Tammas Sangster to be the sheep-dog——"

The precentor, however, suddenly interrupted the minister under a sense of humiliation in being considered the sheep-dog of the illustration. "I'll be no man's sheep-dog, minister," he exclaimed, warmly and indignantly.

"I'm only speaking mystically," explained the minister.

"Na, na," retorts Tammas Sangster, "I ken fine ye wisna speakin' mystically. Ye wis speakin' maliciously, just to gar the folk lauch at me when we get oot."

But after all that has been said about the poor and unattractive singing of the auld precentor, it is only fair to chronicle the fact that he had his admirers here and there. The Rev. Mr. M'Dougal, of Paisley, used to tell of his having been accosted by a man one day, when the following colloquy took place:—

"You're Mr. M'Dougal, I think?"

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"Yes; how do you happen to know me?"

"Weel, I'm whiles in your kirk."

"Do you live in Paisley?"

"No; I leeve in Glesca."

"Then, I suppose, you sometimes stay with friends in Paisley when you come to worship with us there?"

"No, no; I just walk out on the Sundays."

"That's a long walk between Glasgow and Paisley," observed Mr. M'Dougal, who was beginning to feel proud of his power of drawing a congregation. "Do you stay overnight, then, after going to church?"

"No; I just walk back to Glesca again."

"That is indeed a long walk, and says something for the power of the preacher."

"No doubt it's a guid lang walk, but I think an awfu' lot o' your precentor!"

It is not easy to imagine the case of a precentor falling asleep in his desk, for the space was so confined and limited that there must have been small comfort in the process, even supposing he did drop over. This idea must have occurred to the late Duke of Buccleuch, who, on one occasion, presided at a public meeting held in a church. Occupying the precentor's desk, as chairman, His Grace afterwards remarked that he did not wonder there were so few sleepy precentors, since there was no accommodation for them had they been ever so anxious to get forty winks.

And yet the act of sleeping in the desk has actually been performed, and the sight of a drowsy precentor has been witnessed on more than one occasion. An







DR. GUTHRIE PREACHING IN THE GLEN  
By Sir George Harvey, P.R.S.A.



## PRAYERS FOR THOSE IN DISTRESS

amusing instance happened one Sunday morning in an Edinburgh church, where a young preacher suddenly came to a standstill, became confused, and felt unable to proceed further in consequence of memory failing him.

At that moment, to the great amusement of the congregation, the precentor awoke from the sleep in which he had been indulging. Naturally concluding that the sermon was at an end, he rose and read the following intimation: "Remember in prayer a young man in great distress of body and mind."

Few requests for prayer have been so singularly applicable as that unwittingly expressed by the newly awakened precentor.

These requests for prayer, announced by the precentor, were not always received with the seriousness which was their due. A written line was handed one Sunday morning to the precentor of a church in Hamilton, requesting the prayers of the congregation for the person named in the line, who was in deep distress. Unfortunately the name had been written on the back of a letter, and after the first psalm was sung the person who had handed in the notice had the mortification to hear the precentor read out in a loud voice, "Remember in prayer, Thomas Watson, Weaver, Quarry Loan, with a burden."

This custom of asking for the prayers of the congregation was once taken advantage of in a ludicrous way by Andrew M'Lay, a person of weak intellect, who lived at Balfron, and was a regular attender at the church, where his behaviour at times disturbed the

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solemnity of the service. At one time when political feeling was running high, and the government of Sir Robert Peel appeared to be likely to fall, Andrew attended church, and, waiting till the appropriate time, cried out, "Remember in prayer Sir Robert Peel, in great distress."

Desiring the prayers of the congregation on behalf of David——, Mr. Shirra, of Kirkcaldy, looked over the side of the pulpit and said to the precentor, "Is David ill?" Answering in the affirmative, the minister replied, "Well, let us pray for him," and forthwith did so in the petition of Psalm 132, "Lord, remember David and all his afflictions."

But stranger incidents than these happened. If the precentor sometimes dozed off during the sermon, the minister occasionally returned the compliment by sleeping during the singing of the psalm. After an exhausting effort one day in the pulpit a minister sat down and fell fast asleep after setting the precentor agoing. Though of short duration, that sleep was sweet in quality if we judge from the thought that was uppermost in the first blush of returning consciousness occasioned by the precentor calling out, "It's a' dune—it's a' dune!"

"Weel, weel," said the minister drowsily, "tell Kirsty there's plenty mair in the greybeard!"

Another drowsy minister, Mr. Shanks, of Aberdeen, fell sound asleep one morning after giving out the first psalm. The opportunity was favourable, as it was the custom in that church for the precentor to continue singing until tapped on the head by the

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minister, when it was thought that all the congregation had come.

On the occasion referred to, the precentor sang away till he could warble no longer, and at last stopped. This awoke the minister, who rose, tapped the precentor on the head as usual, and angrily asked, "What's your business stoppin' before you got the putt?" — *i.e.* got the signal to stop. To this demand the precentor replied, "It's easy for you, minister, to sit snottin' up there, an' keep me ba', ba'ing, till there's scarcely left a breath in my body."

The next precentor drew the line at four verses, although the quantity of psalm announced by the minister considerably exceeded that number. Sitting down at the end of four he resolutely refused to sing another stanza. The minister leant over the pulpit, and thus addressed him, "Man, Jamie, if ye make sic a wark about skirlin' out four single verses, how d'ye think ye're to manage to sing psalms through a' the ages o' eternity?"

During the war with France, the Rev. Mr. Leslie, of St. Andrews, one Sunday morning received his weekly newspaper just as he was leaving the manse for his duties in the church. While the precentor was singing the first psalm the minister was busy with his newspaper, and so engrossed was he with the news that he called out at the close of the singing, "Just sing another verse, John, till I finish this paragraph." Of a more obliging disposition than the preceding precentor, John went on with another verse, and thereby procured for the congregation a most interesting

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account from the minister of a great battle that was fully detailed in the newspaper, and which he read to them instead of a sermon.

There was formerly one singular feature in public worship that was observed in St. Enoch's Church, Glasgow. This was the precentor's singing the psalm tunes alone—making solos of them all, and desiring help from nobody. The congregation remained silent, taking as little part in the psalm as in the sermon. This practice was defended on the ground that as the minister alone gave expression to the prayers, the congregation only mentally following these expressions, so in praise the precentor ought alone to conduct the service of praise, and allow the congregation to follow mentally also.

The precentor of Balfron Secession Church delighted much in solo singing in public worship, and was always irritated when any one dared to join in the praise. After being vexed in this way for some time by several of the congregation who had minds of their own, he went home one Sunday in great glee after silencing the malcontents. "I did for them the day," said he to a friend: "they couldna tak' yon ane," alluding to the tune he had sung that morning—so new that nobody could utter a single or solitary cheep by way of accompaniment.

The celebrated R. A. Smith, while precentor in the Abbey Church of Paisley, was evidently of the same opinion, for there he began the practice of solo precenting, and continued it till he received and accepted a call from St. George's, Edinburgh. Asked why he

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wished to leave Paisley, it is said that he gave this as the principal reason—that having got the congregation almost reduced to silence, and the singing nearly all to himself, he was yet so much put out every Sunday by an auld wife persisting in singing, and so much distracted by her skirling in the gallery, that he could not, and would not, endure that distraction any longer. “No,” she “wouldna be quiet,” she replied when remonstrated with; she “would praise the Lord wi’ a’ her micht whether she kent the tune or no’.”

But this practice of solo precenting did not appear to find much favour throughout Scotland: it was against the grain, and against the genius, of Presbyterianism to sit silent during the singing of the old familiar psalms. As a rule the precentors themselves did not like the practice, as may be gathered from the following incident. Whether or not that incident took place at Paisley, deponent sayeth not, but at all events when the precentor of the story asked a friend to take a day in the desk, he at the same time acquainted him with the fact that the congregation did not sing, and that he would require to do that part of the service entirely by himself.

“That’ll no’ suit me,” replied the substitute. “I’ll make them sing!”

“Try it,” replied his friend.

“Ay, I’ll try it.”

The opportunity came, and with it the clear full voice of the precentor for the day. As the melody passed from note to note along the first two lines of the 42nd Psalm, it received not the slightest assist-

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ance from the large congregation. Determined, however, to make them join in the service of praise, the precentor paused, and remarked, "My friends, as you do not seem to know this tune, I'll try another."

Again he sang the well-known lines, but only with the same result. Once more he paused and said, "You don't seem to know this one either. I'll try a third—one that everybody knows, or should know."

No sooner did he commence the lines of the psalm for the third time, and with a third tune, than the tongues of the congregation were loosed, and a thousand voices joined in the grand old strain—

Like as the hart for water brooks  
In thirst doth pant and bray ;  
So pants my longing soul, O God,  
That come to thee I may.

The man who could do this may be taken as a fair specimen or type of the precentor who began to feel that the professional world in which he lived was getting too small and circumscribed for him. He looked about for an opportunity of adding to the unusually small stock of tunes to which his brother precentors had been content to sing the psalms from one year's end to another. The desire for new tunes was in the air ; the precentor who had any courage at all, had now an opportunity of introducing them. The melancholy cadence of "Coleshill" was being supplanted by the stirring notes of "Sheffield," and so rapidly was this being accomplished that the minister used to cock his ears in the pulpit, and look out for something light and lively for the psalm he had selected. Probably the reaction proceeded just fast enough, for there

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is more than one anecdote of the precentor getting a tap on the head by way of a remonstrance from the minister to the effect of minding what he was about to sing and to "*gie us nane o' your lilts the day.*"

The kirk-session, too, sometimes took the matter in hand and cautioned the precentor against the introduction of new tunes. In Doune Anti-Burgher Church the tune "Evan" was sung for the first time one Sunday morning, and caused much commotion. The precentor was summoned before the session. In vain he pleaded that it was a good tune, and might be with advantage introduced into the worship of the church; he was solemnly rebuked, and warned never again to introduce a new tune. He was a good man and accepted the "smiting" of the other good men—in his own way. Next Sunday he entered the lectern and led off "Evan," feeling that it was not now a new tune, having been sung in church on the previous Sabbath. Nothing was said about the matter, and "Evan" soon became one of the most popular tunes among the worshippers there.

The author of an interesting paper in the *Perthshire Magazine* entitled "An Old Perthshire Precentor," in describing the days when tunes were few, and tune-books fewer, relates a tradition of the district. "Two enthusiastic sons of song tramped all the way to D—, a distance of twenty miles, to learn some new tune from a brother precentor there, *and whistled it all the way back for fear they should forget it.*" There was enthusiasm! But it was simply in response to the general demand for something new. The young people

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of the congregations began to cry for novelty—anything to get out of the old beaten tracks. The old precentor of a former generation, the owner of two tunes, or half a dozen tunes at the most, got some pretty broad hints that it was time for him to retire. The hint was given in a variety of ways—some of them gentle, and some of them the reverse. An esteemed correspondent sends us a reminiscence of his own on this point. “I remember, when a boy, the congregation in which I was brought up had, as leader of psalmody, a tall man, well up in years, with a hard voice which grated very much on my ear. His voice and the voices of the congregation seemed to be very much out of harmony. Like many more of the old school, he had no great ambition to enlarge his list of tunes—his budget consisting only of the old familiar ‘Coleshill,’ ‘St. David’s,’ ‘Irish,’ and one or two more. These were sung every Sabbath day. It became evident that this state of things could not go on much longer. The younger folks of the congregation were beginning to show signs of discontent, and were longing for something or other to bring about a change. They had not long to wait, and the change was brought about in the following way: During the absence of the minister a brother clergyman of his officiated in his stead, and, being accounted a good musician, used to delight much in testing the efficiency of the precentor who might be conducting the psalmody of the congregation. The test usually applied was the second version of the 136th Psalm, and this was accordingly given out for singing—

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"Praise God, for he is kind :  
His mercy lasts for aye.  
Give thanks with heart and mind  
To God of gods alway :  
For certainly  
His mercies 'dure  
Most firm and sure,  
Eternally.

"Whether the old precentor knew a suitable tune or not, one cannot say, but up he got, all undaunted by the very peculiar metre. It was very soon apparent, however, that the tune selected did not suit the psalm. After floundering away for some time, and receiving no assistance from the pews, the precentor gave it up and sat down—never to raise the psalm in that desk again. So ended the long services of the old man as precentor, and another of more modern accomplishments soon reigned in his stead."

After the reading of the line had been discontinued, a very generally expressed desire sprang up for more tunes, and this desire was conveyed to the precentor, not only by individual members of the congregation, but also through the kirk-session.

Accordingly the *repertoire* of the precentor gradually found enlargement. With the addition of many new tunes there came in, at the same time, the repeating tunes which had a wonderful run for many years. One of the most popular of these was "Eastgate," which was almost always associated with the 133rd Psalm, and sung to no other—

Behold how good a thing it is,  
And how becoming well,  
Together such as brethren are  
In unity to dwell !

(Repeat) In unity to dwell !

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The melody and flow of music from a great congregation singing the psalm to this tune was an experience which was not easily forgotten ; which, perhaps, was never forgotten by those who had been accustomed to the hard old lines of the earlier times.

An old man coming from the country to spend a few days in Edinburgh with a married daughter was taken to one of the city churches on Sunday, when he heard the precentor sing "Redemption," another repeating tune, and generally associated with the 44th Paraphrase. The singing of that tune, and the words to which it was sung, formed an era or turning-point in the hitherto uneventful life of the simple old countryman. One of the verses—

'Tis finished—the Messiah dies  
For sins, but not his own ;  
The great redemption is complete,  
And Satan's pow'r o'erthrown,

and the music to which it was wedded melted the old man to tears. He had hitherto lived a life into which the deeper religious experiences had never entered ; but they now entered with the singing of that paraphrase to the tune of "Redemption." "It beats a'," remarked the old man to his daughter and her husband. "The singin' o' that tune has made a new man o' me. Oh, it's grand—grand ; weel may it be ca'd Redemption, for it'll be the redemption o' me."

With a knowledge of music, the old man was never tired of humming over to himself the verse, with its repeats—

'Tis finish'd—the Messiah dies  
For sins, but not his own ;

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The great redemption is complete,  
And Satan's pow'r o'erthrown,  
And Satan's pow'r o'erthrown.

Of course the repeating tunes had different effects upon different people. A minister who considered them objectionable in every way, on finding that his precentor one Sunday morning had commenced "Eastgate" suddenly called out, "Stop, stop that tune! When the Lord repeats, we'll repeat, but no' till then!"

A precentor in Paisley had occasion to ask a friend to take his place in the desk one Sunday. "Mind this," said the former, "our congregation canna stand repeat-in' tunes, sae steer clear o' repeaters unless ye want a scene."

Whether it was owing to "contrariness," or whether it was the unconscious gliding out of one tune into another, the substitute got the congregation full swing into "Devizes"—one of the most popular of the repeating tunes—and away they went at it with a will that astonished the leader. Remembering the admonition that there probably would be "a scene" in the event of a "new-fangled tune" being sung, the substitute, at the close of the service, slipped out by the vestry door and made his way homeward as quietly as possible. What was his astonishment afterwards to learn that the congregation rather liked "Devizes," and that they had asked their own precentor to repeat it next Sabbath!

Regarding another repeater, "Desert," it eventually became so popular that many of the songs of the day were sung to the tune. And to such an alarming ex-

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tent did this adaptation grow, that ministers and precentors alike agreed to banish it from the service of the church. It was impossible to take a walk in the country without hearing "Desert" sung or whistled; but it was the melody divorced from the psalm and united to the song, and that song was almost always—

O' a' the airts the wind can blaw  
I dearly lo'e the west.

"Desert" was abandoned, as savouring of frivolity; but a worse fate than this befell many of the other repeating tunes. As "Desert" had been sung or whistled out of existence, so most of the others were caricatured into obscurity, and are now only remembered because of the absurdity of their associations.

Even into the venerable Hundredth Psalm did the caricaturist venture to introduce his sorry humour by rendering the lines—

We are his flock, he doth us feed,  
And for his sheep, he doth us take,

into the repeat—

And for his *sheep* he'd,  
And for his *sheep* he'd,  
And for his sheep he doth us take.

This is sorry stuff and rubbish, but the caricaturist effected his object, and ridiculed most of the "repeaters" out of existence. Only a very few of them remain to the present day, and of these few the following are still popular: Eastgate, Invocation, Redemption, St. George's Edinburgh, and Saxony. They are not, however, known as "Repeating" but as "Special" or "Anthem Tunes."

Caricature was sometimes followed by doggerel, for

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the use of those who did not want to use the words of Scripture while practising some of the favourite psalm tunes. Here are a few specimens by way of illustration—

For “French”—

Come, let us sing the tune o’ “French,”

The second measure low ;

The third extendeth very high,

The fourth down, down, doth go.

For “Coleshill”—

O mither, dear, John Lawrie’s lum,

When shall it sweepit be ?

For a’ the soot’s come doon the lum

And spoil’t my granny’s tea.

For “Devizes”—

A weaver said unto his son

The nicht that he was born,

“A blessing on yer curly pow,

Ye’ll gang for pirms the morn.”

With the passing away of the older generation of the auld Scotch precentors, and the incoming of one more in touch with modern times, there accompanied the latter, of necessity, many changes that had hitherto been undreamt of. The half-dozen tunes that had so long done duty in the country kirks—from the Shetland Islands to the Cheviot Hills—increased in number and variety of measures so as to suit every kind of psalm that was found in the metrical version as used in Scotland. The “repeating tunes,” as we have just seen, were for many years very popular. Along with them there came other things—the entrance of innovations and changes that are even yet only in the process of evolution or development.

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In the parish of Old Machar there had been a strong desire expressed for a few more psalm tunes in public worship. The precentor, however, was dead set against any such thing. So high did the feeling run between him and the innovating party that, on one occasion, some of them met him in the street and threatened to do him bodily harm. Fleeing for refuge, he ran up an outside stair, and from it he climbed to the roof of a house, on the ridge of which he perched himself, and looked jeeringly down on his pursuers. When fairly seated on the ridge, the auld precentor created great amusement by giving out, in the style of his minister, a psalm to sing, and the psalm he selected contained this appropriate verse—and the tune to which he sang it was one of the oldest he could remember—

I like an owl in desert am,  
That nightly there doth moan ;  
I watch and like a sparrow am  
On the house-top alone.

The precentor who could teach a congregation to sing such "special" or "anthem tunes" as St. George's Edinburgh, Desert, Saxony, and the "repeaters," required a text or tune-book. To this tune-book on the desk there was at first as much opposition as there was to "paper" in the pulpit. Nevertheless, these text-books increased and multiplied amazingly. Ultimately they did more for the education of the Scottish people in "church music" than anything else had done since the days of the auld Sang Schules already mentioned. The most popular of these books were

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Brown's Robertson's *Sacred Music*, *The Sacred Harp* by (not *the*) Robert Burns, Mitchison's, R. A. Smith's, and others—all filled with the old favourites of a by-gone day: Stroudwater, Peterborough, Bangor, Dundee, Coleshill, Devizes, Artaxerxes, and many others too numerous to be catalogued here.

With the use of such text-books there arose the necessity for a pitch-pipe or pitch-fork, and many "a row" there was over the introduction of this simple and inoffensive instrument. "See what things are coming to," cried an auld wife when she saw her precentor using a pitch-fork for the first time; "see what he's doin'—ackwally usin' *could steel* in the service o' God!"

Another precentor apparently did not know how to use or take care of the pitch-fork after he had got one. In this instance, however, the instrument seems to have been a pipe and not a fork. Having been carelessly carried in the pocket it frequently got choked with crumbs and other débris, so that when blown into, it emitted either an uncertain sound or none at all. Then followed a passage at arms between the crusty old precentor and the pipe. After the psalm had been given out he applied to the pipe for the key, but the pipe remained silent; whereupon the temper that lived in the old man came out quite audibly in the hearing of the congregation—"Tuts—tuts; demmit. Tuts, tuts; confound the pipe; better without it!"

An old friend sends us the following story of another pitch-pipe incident:—

Some sixty years ago the most famous singer in

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the Hillfoot district was Mr. Thomas Martin of Alloa. At that time there resided in the town a half-witted character named Stewart, alias the Kae, or Ke-aw, so named from his fancied resemblance to a jackdaw. Nothing pleased this man better than on a Sunday to get near the precentor, especially if he was a stranger or a candidate, and by singing on a different key to throw him off the tune. Mr. Martin got a hint of this, and as he entered the desk as a candidate, sure enough, there was Stewart sitting only two seats away in front. Before the service commenced, Mr. Martin took out his tuning-fork, struck it, raised it to his ear, and with his full sonorous voice repeated the words, as if trying to catch the key, "Ke-aw, Ke-aw." This was enough. The would-be troubler of Israel rose, disappeared, and never again attempted to trouble the precentor.

With the introduction and multiplication of new tunes there arose the necessity of intimating to the congregation the name of the tune that was to be sung. This intimation was done in various ways—sometimes by the precentor placing on each side of his desk a slip on which was printed in bold and distinct letters the name of the tune for the next psalm.

Sometimes, too, the intimation was made by the minister, on giving out the psalm or paraphrase. Occasionally, in the latter way, there occurred little gleams of humour that relieved the dry monotony of intimations. Thus, after announcing and reading over the 45th Paraphrase, a minister once completed his intimation in these terms—"Third verse,







PRESBYTERIAN CATECHISING  
By John F. H. P. S. A.



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Dost thou not know, self-blinded man !

—the tune is Kilmarnock.”

Another minister used to read out the lines of the psalm immediately after his intimations, and these occasionally suggested a different line of thought from the one intended to be conveyed in the said intimations. “On Wednesday evening, at eight o’clock, the Deacon’s Court will meet—Psalm 119, verse 84—

“How many are thy servant’s days ?

When wilt thou execute

Just judgment on these wicked men

That do me persecute ?”

Amid all these changes the auld Scotch precentor still lingered on the stage, superfluous, perhaps, but spirited enough to hold his own. “I was at the manse the other nicht,” said one of the profession to an old friend, “an’ mean’ the minister got on the crack. Says he to me, ‘Man, John, I’m awfu’ sorry to tell ye, but I wad advise ye to gie up your post, for there’s lots o’ folk sayin’ and compleenin’ that ye canna sing now.’

“‘Weel, sor,’ says I to the minister, ‘I dinna think it’s you that should tell me this, for I hae been tell’t a *dizzen* times at least that *you* canna preach, but I would be the last man to advise ye to gie up your post an’ leave the manse.’

“I saw,” continued the narrator, “that the minister was vexed ; but I just said to him, ‘Never mind, sir, the fules’ll hae to hear us baith till we think fit to stop.’”

There is here the shadow of coming change projecting itself into the declining years of the auld Scotch precentor—“folks sayin’ an’ compleenin’ that ye can-

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na sing now." There is something intensely pathetic about the approach of this shadow. Gradually it comes nearer and nearer until the shadow melts away into thin air, and the substance of the complaint comes in its stead. It is once more the desire for change—sometimes gently expressed, as the minister had done in the manse, and sometimes mercilessly played off as a practical joke.

An auld precentor had frequently got the hint to resign; but he stuck to his post, and the more hints he got, the more airs he put on. On Sunday mornings he used to come in from the vestry arrayed in all the glory of his Sunday "braws." Head in air, he proceeded to his desk, pulled up his coat-sleeves to exhibit his cuffs, lifted his coat dependencies, and then—sat down. All this had gone on for years, for the auld man had a touch of vanity in him—the only failing that has been recorded of him, and that was not much, poor man. Many a hint to resign had been given him, as already mentioned, but the "Sons of Belial" proved too many for him in the end. Some of those most anxious for his resignation had secretly tampered with the seat in the desk, and calmly waited the result. Sunday morning came, and the old man sailed in as usual. The cuffs and coat-tails were carefully adjusted, and, sitting down—he disappeared. Gathering himself up, he left the desk, and never again did he enter it.

While there was occasional unsuitableness of the precentor's psalm, or paraphrase, to the preacher's sermon, there was also frequent complaint on the

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score of unsuitable tunes to the passages selected for praise. Several years ago, the late Dr. Wallace, of Campbell Street U.P. Church, Glasgow, was preaching in a country church, where he underwent a similar experience to that already recorded of Dr. Robertson, of Irvine. He gave out one short metre psalm, two long metres, and the paraphrase—

Few are thy days, and full of woe,  
O man, of woman born !  
Thy doom is written, "Dust thou art,  
And shalt to dust return."

To these sad sentiments the precentor sang a jubilant and triumphant tune—the tune of "Desert." The mixture, inharmonious and incongruous, provoked a reproof from the preacher while in the vestry after service. "Ye had yoursel' to blame, Doctor," replied the precentor. "That was the only common metre ye gaed out, an' Jock Macgregor cam' six mile to sing the bass solo o' that time, an' d'ye think I wad hae disappointed him! Na, fegs, na, Doctor: no' if I could help it."

All these jokes and incidents at the expense of the old precentor tell their own story, and indicate the approaching shadow of change, and of age with its accompanying infirmities. An aged precentor having been asked to conduct the singing at a certain meeting, and a psalm-book having been handed to him for the purpose, got no further with his opening verse than "O Lord," when he threw down the book with the pathetic remark, "The print's owre sma', I canna see't."

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It is not often we hear of the precentor's love affairs—if he had any. There can be little doubt that his manly form, and his clear ringing voice, must have awakened feelings of admiration, or something deeper, in the breast of many of his fair hearers on Sunday. This, we know, was a common experience, and may still be for aught we know to the contrary, in the case of bachelor ministers. It must have been so in the experience also of bachelor precentors. That it was so, indeed, is evident from the well-known song by William Cross, of which the following verses are illuminating :—

May came hame wi' her heart in her mouth,  
An' became frae that hour a dessenter.  
An' noo she's renewin' her youth  
Wi' some hopes o' the Free Kirk Precentor.  
Oh ! but she's sly, sly,  
Oh ! but she's sly and sleekit.  
An' cleverly opens ae door,  
As sune as anither is steekit.

Fordoun had a precentor of whom much is known. This was John Sievewright. During his term of office he got a few good singers to assist him in leading the congregational psalmody. These he placed before him in the front gallery—an arrangement which may be said to be the beginning of what is now common in almost every church in Scotland—a trained choir.

The date of John Sievewright's entering on office at Fordoun may be gathered from the following rhyme quoted in Mr. Mollyson's *Parish of Fordoun: Chapters in its History, or Reminiscences of Place and Character*—a volume full of local interest.

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Says the rhyme, for it cannot be called poetry—

'Twas seventeen-hundred-and-ninety-four  
When Hieland John the hills came oure,  
He learned them a' to gape an' glour,  
An' sing the tunes in Fordoun.

Ae simmer Sunday in July,  
Soon after Paldy Fair was bye,  
John took the road wi' help to try  
An' lead the praise in Fordoun.

But though he made nae little din,  
An' threw his face frae broo to chin,  
The feint ae tune could John begin,  
Waur couldna be in Fordoun.

The doctor's face grew red that day,  
He rose and shook his locks so grey,  
Cried, "Stop, stop, John, an' let us pray—  
Gude sake, can this be Fordoun!"

According to local tradition, Sieviewright was much above the average in merit as a precentor—notwithstanding the allusions to failure which we have just quoted. He composed several tunes himself; and a collection of sacred music bearing his name was in use in the early part of the century. It was entitled "A Collection of Church Tunes and Anthems in three parts, with a few duets, catches, glees, &c., selected from the best authors."

As innovations and changes crept in among the church services in Scotland, the auld precentor was gradually forced out. New tunes, pitch-forks, tune-books, suggestions as to standing at singing and sitting at prayer, classes for instruction in psalmody—all had a hand in turning the auld man out of his desk. A new

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generation arose that knew not Joseph. Precentors who were unknown outside the bounds of their own parish began to give way to men who became enthusiasts in music and composers of psalm tunes. An interesting chapter might be written on the life and works of such men as R. A. Smith, John Wilson, T. L. Hatley, David Kennedy, and many others—all of whom were precentors.

Standing at prayer and sitting during singing was long ago the orthodox position in public worship. When this order of things was reversed, there were some of the very orthodox ministers who looked upon the change as an immediate step to Romanism, and who would on no account tolerate it.

The following advertisement, which appeared in *The Glasgow Herald* on 31st March 1862, shows that as recently as fifty years ago there were people who objected strongly to any innovations in the Church service:—

### SANDYFORD CHURCH

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THE CONGREGATION OF SANDYFORD CHURCH are requested to meet in the Queen's Rooms THIS EVENING, the 31st instant, at eight o'clock, to consider as to a change in the Mode of Public Worship contemplated by a certain party or parties as respects Kneeling at Prayers and standing while singing, and particularly of all such as are opposed to any change in these respects, or as to the introduction of Instrumental Music of any description whatever

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without the previous sanction of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland as by law established. Without such authority where is innovation to end? "My son, fear thou the Lord and the King, and meddle not with them that are given to change."—Proverbs xxiv. 21.

A very conservative minister, officiating in a church to which a precentor was appointed, was somewhat surprised to find that the leader of the psalmody kept his seat during the singing along with the congregation. This the clergyman was opposed to. It had been the custom of the precentor to stand, and his reverence approved of the old rule, although he would not fall in with the new order in regard to the congregation. For some Sabbaths the worthy official kept his seat, but at length the minister, remonstrating with him, suggested that it would be better for *him* to stand when leading the praise. "Na, na, sir," replied the musician in a tone of authority, "if it's wrang for the lave to stand, it's wrang for me, sae I'll juist sit." A stiff battle the old-time precentor maintained against the introduction of innovations and changes, but they came in spite of him. For generations the metrical version of the psalms had alone been used in public worship, but by and by the paraphrases edged their way in.

Over Scotland generally there was a strong dislike to the introduction of the paraphrases. Precentors could not be induced to try them. They imagined that new tunes would be needed to sing them. In that they were probably right; for what might suit a psalm might not always suit a paraphrase. But the people them-

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selves, as a rule, were dead against the introduction of anything that might affect the old familiar psalms. Some of the older folks who had just adjusted their spectacles on their nose, and quietly waited for the announcement of the psalm, simply took off their spectacles, shoved them into their cases, and sat dumb and motionless when a paraphrase was given out. The precentor, who had been previously won over by the minister, started the singing, of course; but he got the singing all to himself, except in cases where the younger members of the congregation enjoyed the change, and heartily joined in the service of praise. Dr. Russell, of Yarrow, tells us how his father introduced the paraphrases. He waited till the communion season came round. When a large congregation had met in solemn assembly, the minister of Yarrow opened the service with the beautiful 35th Paraphrase, and, to their credit, all joined heartily in the voice of praise.

Describing the characteristic traits of some typical Secession elders, Mr. Tait, in his *Two Centuries of Border Church Life*, relates how a staunch Antiburgher obstinately refused to sing a paraphrase. His seat was in the gallery of the old meeting-house, and his figure, bent over the closed book, was conspicuous when the precentor was singing it. If it was the last singing for the day, the Antiburgher would slowly rise and make his way down the stair.

The long and angry battle over the introduction of hymns in public worship is of too recent a date to find a place here. The same remark might apply to the instrumental music question, were it not for the fact

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that this movement began much earlier than is generally supposed. The first indication of its appearance in Scotland, and the first public utterance in its support, seem to be associated with an itinerant minister named "Preachin' Georgie," who lived and flourished about the close of last or beginning of the present century.

On one occasion this eccentric evangelist went up to the pulpit of a country kirk with a fiddle under his arm. After giving out the psalm, he took his fiddle, and having given the precentor the keynote, accompanied him right through the psalm. Observing some tittering among the congregation, Preachin' Georgie took occasion in his prayer to express himself in this way—

"Good Lord, Thy people—Thine own peculiar chosen people of old—were wont to praise Thee with tabbor, and with harp, and with sackbut, and with psaltery. And Thy douce and loyal servants were seen dancing and skipping, and snapping their fingers to Thy praise; and weel were they rewarded for it. But nowadays, nothing will serve us but sighing and groaning and squeaking and howling out dismal psalm tunes, wi' feet nailed to the yirth, an' faces an' ell lang, an' meikle disloyalty in our hearts after a'. Gif Thy blessing reach us, it maun surely be mair by Thy favour than our ain guid guiding, I trow."

So much for the introduction of the fiddle; the organ comes next. The first minister of St. Andrew's Parish Church in Glasgow was Dr. Ritchie. With the consent of his congregation he introduced a small organ, which was the workmanship, by the way, of the famous

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James Watt, who then resided in the Saltmarket, and worshipped in St. Andrew's Church.

This introduction of the organ produced a lively sensation in Glasgow. The Presbytery took up the matter, and many people could neither eat nor sleep over the business. Some took to writing pamphlets, and others to scribbling letters to the newspapers—all over the unhappy little organ in St. Andrew's Parish Kirk. The commotion only subsided in 1808, on Dr. Ritchie's removal to Edinburgh—"Out of the way and out of mischief," as some of the pamphleteers put in. A ludicrous representation of the Doctor appeared in *Kay's Edinburgh Portraits*, where he is represented as trudging on foot from Glasgow with an organ on his back. Stopping at a part of the road where Glasgow is seen in the distance, Dr. Ritchie slings round his organ and lets off the steam by vigorously grinding away to the tune of "I'll gang nae mair to yon toon."

Meanwhile the unconscious cause of all this commotion was relegated to some backseat in the church, and was never again used. The auld precentor was reinstated in the desk.

Among the earlier instances of church choirs being introduced in public worship, the first recorded seems to be that in connection with the Common Hall of the University of Glasgow. In 1815—Waterloo year—Mr. Milne, a licentiate of the Church of Scotland, conducted divine service during the session. The choir was a great attraction not only to the professors, but to such of the general public as cared to occupy the gallery.

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St. Giles was the first Presbyterian Church in Edinburgh in which the precentor came down from his desk and gave way to "the incipient innovation of the time"—the service of song. Dr. Russell, of Yarrow, relates that on one occasion the Earl of Haddington attended public worship in the Cathedral, and was greatly shocked when the psalm was given out and no voices sang it but the choir. Turning round to Dr. Russell's father, the Earl, who had been accustomed to the old form of worship from his childhood, remarked, with much earnestness of voice and manner, "I came here to praise my Maker, and not to hear a concert!"

Now that organs and choirs are in almost every church in Scotland, it may be interesting to note here, but only by the way, one or two anecdotes illustrative of the strong feeling that was prevalent on the part of those who opposed the introduction of instrumental music in public worship.

A story is told of a minister's son meeting his companion one day, and communicating to him this important piece of news—"My father's got an organ in his church now." "Oh," replied the other, with different associations clinging round the instrument, "has he got a puggy too?"

On the introduction of an organ into a church in the North, one of the members took offence and left. Meeting one of those who had remained, the former asked how the organ was getting on. "Oh, brawly," was the answer—"just blawin' away the cauf (chaff) an' lettin's keep the corn."

At a certain meeting of Presbytery, one of the mem-

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bers urged that organs should be introduced in order to draw more young people to the church; whereupon an old minister remarked that this was acting on the principle of "O, whistle an' I'll come t'ye, my lad."

Asked what she thought of the organ recently introduced into her church, an old lady replied, "It's very bonnie; but, oh dear me, it's an' awfu' way o' spendin' the Sabbath."

To the Scottish heart there are fewer things so dear, so tender, and so touching as the memories and associations which cluster round the familiar psalms, and the tunes to which most of them were wedded in the auld precenting days.

Dr. Russell, of Yarrow, was in the habit of conducting an annual service in summer in the churchyard of St. Mary's, on the hillside overlooking the lonely loch. It was held in the open air, and large numbers of people flocked to the romantic spot. The scene was a most impressive one, and brought to mind what a gathering of the Covenanters would be like. The preacher stood in front of the old broken wall of the churchyard, and the congregation were seated on the heather before him. The precentor's music of "Martyrdom," or "Kilmarnock," or "Bangor," broke the silence of the everlasting hills, and was wafted across the placid waters of St. Mary's Loch.

Describing another open-air service—the summer Sacrament of Stichel—Dr. Waugh, in Mr. Tait's *Two Centuries of Border Church Life*, specially notes the influence of the "grave sweet melody" of praise.

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“Martyrs” so sung on Stichel braes “might almost arrest an angel on his errand of mercy ; and would afford him more pleasure than all the chanting, and all the music, and all the organs, in all the cathedrals of Europe.”

The 124th Psalm, second version, goes through one like the sound of a trumpet—

Now Israel  
May say, and that truly,  
If that the Lord  
Had not our cause maintain'd ;  
If that the Lord  
Had not our right sustain'd,  
When cruel men  
Against us furiously  
Rose up in wrath,  
To make of us their prey.

In an interesting volume descriptive of Scottish village life, and lately published under the title of *BarnCraig*, the author introduces groups of villagers recalling their reminiscences of precentors. “Did ye ever hear Swankey on the hundred an’ twenty-fourth?” asked Adam Bell, not pausing for an answer. “Man, I’ve heard him gang through’t frae first to last, an’ his e’en fair wild: ‘The ragin’ streams wi’ their proud swellin’ waves had then our souls o’erwhelmed i’ the deep.’ He’s clean daft about it: says it’s as fine a war sang as ‘Scots wha hae.’”

The tune to which this stirring psalm is always sung, Old 124th, as it is called, has been for centuries popular in Scotland. Calderwood, the historian, relates how it was sung in 1582 on the return of John Durie after a temporary banishment from Scotland.

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Landing at Leith, he was met by a great concourse of the citizens, and as they moved upwards towards Edinburgh the numbers had increased to over 2000 persons. "At the Netherbow," says Calderwood, "they took up the 124th Psalm, 'Now Israel may say,' and sang in such a pleasant tune in four parts known to the most part of the people, that coming up the street all bareheaded till they entered the kirk, with such a great sound and majestic, that it moved both themselves and all the huge multitude of the beholders looking out at the shots and over stairs with admiration and astonishment. The Duke of Lennox himself beheld, and reave his beard for anger. He was more affrayed of this sight than anie thing that ever he had seen before in Scotland. When they came to the kirk Mr. James Lowsone made a short exhortation in the Reader's place (the precentor's desk or lettern) to move the multitude to thankfulness. Thereafter a psalm being sung, they departed with great joy."

The General Assembly which met in Glasgow, when Prelacy was abolished and Presbyterianism restored, was closed by singing the 133rd Psalm—

Behold how good a thing it is,  
And how becoming well,  
Together such as brethren are  
In unity to dwell !

Interesting as are the national associations clinging round the old familiar psalms, the congregational associations are not a whit less interesting. In one sense, indeed, they are even more so, for the congrega-

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tional element comes more closely into the personal experience of each member, and becomes part and parcel of every Scotsman's earliest memories and latest inheritance. Sweet and tender and touching as most of the hymns are that are used in public worship now, yet to those of us who were brought up under the old dispensation in the days when the precentor reigned in the desk, the psalms can never lose their grip. Nor is it possible to dissociate or separate some peculiar psalm from the tune to which we have been accustomed to hear it sung. You may as well seek to sing the Scotch national anthem—

Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled,  
to any other tune than "Scots wha hae," as think  
of

I to the hills will lift mine eyes  
without "French," or

Behold how good a thing it is  
to anything else than the fine swinging melody of  
"Eastgate." There are few elderly Scotsmen, if indeed there be any at all, who can go through the psalms without humming over their corresponding tunes. The two associations are linked together for life, and he is a poor singer and a poor psalm-reader who would seek to separate them. What is true of this personal association is not less true of the congregational element in this association. Let the following incident illustrate this point :—

Some thirty years ago the Rev. Hugh Stowell Brown went to Aberdeen to deliver a lecture in one of the Free Churches of the city. He began the business

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of the evening by giving out the Hundredth Psalm. The precentor and choir struck up "St. Catherine"—a longmetre tune at that time very popular in Aberdeenshire. As "St. Catherine" begins on the same key and continues on the same first two notes as "Old Hundred," the result was that both audience and lecturer went off with the latter tune, and gave "St. Catherine" the go-by. Throughout the first and second verses of the psalm, it was doubtful which was to prevail—"St. Catherine" or "Old Hundred." The latter, however, at last took the lead—precentor and choir going over to the majority, and letting the grand old tune rejoin its grander old psalm.

In a Glasgow church on one occasion the 121st Psalm,

I to the hills will lift mine eyes,

was parted from its "French," and sung to the tune of "Invocation." The result was unfortunate, and but for the simplicity of the youthful singer who occupied the precentor's desk for the day, would have been regarded as the height of irreverence, or absurdity, by the congregation, who were compelled to sing and declare—

He slum—He slum—

He slumbers not nor sleeps :

—Bers not nor sleeps—Bers not nor sleeps.

It is not easy to dissociate "Coleshill," of the old communion seasons, from the 103rd Psalm—

O thou my soul, bless God the Lord ;

And all that in me is

Be stirred up his holy name

To magnify and bless.







THE MINISTER'S WIFE  
By J. Graham Gilbert, R.S.A.



## INNOVATION IN PUBLIC WORSHIP

One of the most touching associations of this psalm and tune is that related by the Rev. Dr. Norman Macleod in his memorials of John Macintosh. During the last illness of "The Earnest Student," Dr. Macleod spent an evening with his friend. "I selected a psalm," he writes, "which, in spite of trial, we now felt to be peculiarly appropriate—the 103rd; and to link us still more with other days, with home, and scenes of peace, *I gave out the line* before singing it, and my tune was *Coleshill*; for both psalm and tune, thus sung, are associated by every member of the Scottish Church with seasons of holy communion, and never fail to summon up vivid pictures and undying memories from the past—of the old church where he used to worship, and the churchyard where his dearest lie interred—with the once familiar faces and forms of Christian friends now no more; and to recall, also, periods of his life in which, perhaps, more than in any other he enjoyed fellowship with God."

Called to see an old precentor who had been laid aside by illness for some weeks, a friend stood by his bedside and inquired of his welfare in the prospect of approaching death. But there was no response to the kind and sympathetic inquiry. Taking the apparently dying man's hand in his own, the visitor slowly recited the 23rd Psalm, and then sang it softly to the tune with which the patient had always associated it in public worship.

As the well-known strains fell upon the old man's ear, they seemed to touch some cord in the chambers of memory. The pulse quickened, the hand moved,

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the head turned round, and the eyes opened. He who had been thought dying and entering the valley of the shadow of death revived. "The Twenty-third Psalm!" he said, looking up in the visitor's face. "It was aye dear to me, an' mair than ever now!"

Directing nourishment to be brought and administered, the visitor had the satisfaction of seeing the patient restored, not only to health and strength, but also to his place in the precentor's desk.

CHAPTER SIX  
THE ELDER AT THE PLATE



## CHAPTER SIX ON THE ELDER AT THE PLATE

AT ANNUAL CHURCH MEETINGS OR SOI-rees there is often experienced a feeling of pity for the poor treasurer whose lot it is to stand up in presence of the congregation and submit what is technically called his Financial Statement or Report. This statement is generally regarded as the driest and dreariest part of the evening's entertainment—a something which has, of course, to be laid before the members of the church, in terms of the Act of General Assembly or some superior ecclesiastical court—but a something which it is desirable, at the same time, to get shunted off the programme as quickly as possible. The chairman, as minister of the congregation, has his review of the year to relate, with abundance of opportunity for introducing as many anecdotes and stories as he likes by way of illustration. The session-clerk may have much interesting information to communicate if he cares to look over his minute-book or roll of membership for the past year. The other heads of departments, or conveners of committees, have each their respective reports to read, and these must be singularly dry indeed if they do not contain something to interest and even amuse the audience.

With the treasurer, however, the case seems to be quite different, for his statement generally consists of a few "remarks" wrapped up in an ill-digested mass of figures which have neither life nor interest in them. Some grumbling is indulged in when these figures compare unfavourably with the preceding

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year, and then the unfortunate official concludes his remarks or "statement," like Oliver Twist, by asking "for more"—more liberality for the current year, more money at the church-door collections, more interest in what he has done his best to make not a little distasteful and wholly uninteresting. A dreary business altogether.

But the treasurer has himself entirely to blame for this state of matters. There is no reason why his report or statement should be regarded as the dreariest portion of the evening's entertainment. There is still less reason why he himself should be looked upon as the Dryasdust or the Heavysterne of the annual congregational meeting. There is a world of interest lying among his figures, if only he would look behind them and rightly interpret what they symbolise. The treasurer should "magnify his office." For it is one of much importance in every congregation, whether large or small, whether in the great city, or only in the small country village.

The church-door collection is perhaps the most remarkable institution that we have in connection with the observance of public worship. It certainly is the most ancient. The first church-door collection of which we have any authentic record was made nearly *three thousand years ago*; and though change has followed change in rapid succession down through the ages, the collection has survived every change, and remains among us to this day, at once the most ancient and the freshest of all our social institutions. The narrative of the first recorded collection is related in

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the 24th chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles, and forms the only occasion when a collection is mentioned in the Old Testament Scriptures. In conjunction with the high priest, the good King Joash undertook the restoration of the Temple of Jerusalem, which had not only been plundered of its vessels for the service of Baal but much injured structurally during the reign of Athaliah. Not satisfied with the progress made by the priests in gathering the contributions of the people, the King constructed a money, or collecting-box, in the well-known form of a chest, doubtless with a slit in the lid, and placed it at the gate of the Temple while the congregation passed in to public worship. The collection was entirely successful; "money was gathered in abundance." With this liberal collection, continued as long as was necessary, the repairs of the Temple were not only completed, but there was money enough left to provide a new supply of sacred vessels used in the service of the sanctuary.

The novelty of the experiment had no doubt something to do with its success; but there was something more than novelty. There was a touch of human nature in it. Had the pious and patriotic King of Judah, who reigned in the far back times of nearly a thousand years before the birth of Christ, and who is entitled to a place in history as the founder of the church-door collection, issued a Royal Proclamation to the effect that the half-shekel enjoined by the law of Moses as an offering in the Temple was to be more rigorously enforced than ever before, the probability is that the compulsory offering would have slipped

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quietly out of existence. Human nature never takes kindly to the tax-gatherer or the rate-collector. People love to give their money freely or not at all. The sixpence dropped into the plate at the church-door is given in a very different spirit from that in which the Income Tax is paid to the Inland Revenue Office. About the hardest thing to get out of human nature is a little ready money. Such was evidently the opinion of one Parish minister, not of the old school, who concluded an appeal for greater congregational liberality with the words, "And as for the miserable pittance which I receive from the congregation of —, it is barely sufficient to keep my wife in tennis balls, and myself in gloves."

Though the church-door collection is the most ancient of all our institutions in connection with the observance of public worship, it is yet remarkable that the word "collection" appears only twice in the Bible, once in the Old Testament, and once in the New. The former appearance has already been referred to: the latter occurs in Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians. It might easily be supposed that the great Apostle of the Gentiles had in his thoughts the raising of money for building places of worship for the early Christian Church in every city where a church had been planted. But it was not so: nothing indeed was further from his thoughts. St. Paul's collections were all for the poor, and for no other object—not even for his own necessities, as these were provided for by the labour of his own hands.

It is difficult for any one to rise from a careful study

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of the New Testament without being impressed by the fact that almsgiving, contributions, subscriptions, collections—call them by whatever name you like—form a distinctive characteristic of the ethical teaching and the personal example of Christ. His thoughts were much concerned about the poor. He has left on record the everyday experienced fact that the poor are with us always—a fact which carries with it the natural and inseparable deduction that it is the duty and the privilege of the rich to assist the honest and deserving poor. But to show that the right spirit in giving is everything, and that collections are not to be estimated according to big sums put into the plate on Sundays, Christ singled out for admiration, and, as an example of giving, the poor widow who cast into the Treasury at the gate of the Temple the two mites which have made her for ever one of the world's worthies.

Such worthies are still to be found: the type is neither dead nor fossilised. As an example the widow's gift has proved of inestimable value: it has probably brought more money into the plate than any other instance of liberality on record.

The Scots have always taken naturally, and even kindly, to the church-door collection. It is one of the features of Scottish Church life. A "bad headache" or a "sore throat" may stave it off for one Sunday; but the inevitable returns a week later, accompanied by a still small voice which suggests that the offering intended for the plate on the day of the headache, or the sore throat, should be added to the present col-

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lection out of sheer gratitude for freedom from pain, if from no higher motive.

When a child is taken to church for the first time, the collection attracts his attention at the door, or in the lobby, and he looks with a feeling of awe upon

The solemn elders at the plate,  
who, according to R. L. Stevenson,  
Stand drinkin' deep the pride o' State.

Neither so solemn nor so proud, however, as to be above the act of condescending, with a gracious smile, to bestow a pat and a blessing on the head of the little one who has reached up her tiny hand to place the modest halfpenny, or the more liberal penny, among the offerings of the congregation. The penny dropped into the plate marks the beginning of a new experience in the young churchgoer's life; and one may rest assured that she will as soon think of going to public worship in future without her hat as without her penny.

There is a little incident which illustrates not only the first lesson in giving, but the fact that the elder is only a human being after all, even while standing at the plate. A mother, after dropping her own gift into the collection, put a coin into the hand of her three-year-old toddler, and guided her also to the plate. As the elder became a little impatient at the delay caused by this movement, the mother said, "Have patience, elder. I want to bring the wee thing up to it."

Impatience in high place reminds one of the story of a little girl who was taken to church one day in the

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country where the collection was "lifted" after the sermon, instead of before the service at the church door. Impatient, uneasy, and unhappy, during a long sermon, the little lady whispered, as she pointed in the direction of two elderly men sitting near the pulpit stair, "I say, mamma, give them their penny, and let us go."

A little fellow was sitting beside his father in church when the collecting ladle was slowly but steadily approaching. Anxious to do his part, he yet revealed his greater anxiety regarding the promised enjoyment of a visit to the circus on the following evening, by whispering audibly, "I say, papa, don't give too much. Keep something for to-morrow, mind."

The church collection grows with the Scotsman's growth. It even forms an integral part of his moral and intellectual training. It enters largely into the subtle and abstruse calculations which it sets him to solve as to whether the penny destined for the plate is to be estimated according to the amount he possesses, or whether it is to be accepted in proportion to the difficulty he feels in parting with it. The thought of the plate on Sunday morning even sharpens and refines our countrymen's physical sense of touch, as on his way to church he secretly fumbles among his loose coins to pick out a sixpence from among the shillings, or a florin from among the half-crowns. It is greatly to be regretted, for obvious reasons, that the fourpenny has been withdrawn from circulation. For the difference between it and the existing threepenny was about as nice a piece of secret examination and

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applied liberality as any churchgoer could be called upon to undertake and decide.

It must have been in the days of the fourpenny that a clergyman used the following illustration in the course of a sermon on "Christian Liberality." "There are still many amongst us," he said, "who while engaged in singing, apparently with all their heart and soul, the lines—

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small,

are yet diligently engaged scraping the edge of a three-penny to make sure that it isn't a fourpenny."

The church-door collection forms such an integral part of public worship that it is as difficult to think of the one without the other, as to think of the other without the one. The old seceders always held that the collections formed part of their worship, and they used to quote as their authority Psalm xcvi.—

Give ye the glory to the Lord  
That to his name is due :  
*Come ye into his courts and bring  
An offering with you.*

At a meeting of the Congregational Union held in Glasgow, 3rd May 1888, one of the speakers complained that the money was kept too much in the background, and that the collections were made at the door as if the congregation were ashamed of them. "Why," continued the speaker, "the worship of God begins before the minister gets into the pulpit. The collections are part of the service; and if they were made more openly perhaps they would be more liberal." The public generally will possibly not support the reverend

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gentleman's complaint in regard to money being kept too much in the background. The complaint is more likely to be that in church matters money comes too much to the front.

A number of years ago the Rev. Mr. Lawson, of Maybole, spent a very pleasant week on Ailsa Craig, during which he gave a series of lectures on week-evenings, and preached twice on Sunday. As exemplifying the kindness of the people on the island—a very small company—Mr. Lawson states that “*they insisted on making a collection* for his Sabbath School, which realised 16s.”

On one occasion some men were at sea in an open boat during a gale that suddenly sprang up. As the gale increased the men became alarmed, fearing that at any moment they might be swamped and sent to the bottom. The person in charge of the boat, in an imploring tone, called to his companions in peril, “Will some o’ ye offer up a bit prayer?” There was no response, however. Then he lifted up his voice again, and cried even more imploringly than before, “Will some o’ ye sing a psalm, or gae ower a paraphrase?” But still there was no response. Whereupon the poor fellow pulled off his cap and said, in desperation, “Then I maun do something religious—*I’ll take a collection.*”

In the days when there were neither poor-laws to enforce, nor poor-rates to collect, the Church of Scotland took the poor people in hand, and she did her part in no half-hearted or indifferent fashion. The first and foremost force in every parish was the minister, and the second was scarcely if at all inferior—

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namely, the Kirk-Session. Like every other human institution, the session was far from being perfect—just as the Divinely-appointed twelve apostles were also human and imperfect—but its members were men of earnestness, well-affected in a good cause, and doing their best to act up to the light that was given to each of them.

Next to the minister, the most important member of the session was the treasurer, a strong man, mentally and physically, with much force of character, prudent withal, warm-hearted, open-handed, and sympathetic. He had a kind and encouraging word for the poor, and an honest sterling ring about him that kept him straight and square in the numerous monetary transactions that were continually passing through his hands.

On Sunday mornings the treasurer had so much to look after, and so many people to reply to, that he deputed one of his fellow office-bearers to stand at the church door and keep an eye on the collection. In a grim kind of way, but not without a little humour in his eye, this elder guarded the plate, and saw that no one passed into the church without contributing something, however little—the only exceptions being the very poor and the very young. The amount collected was, after service, carefully counted, recorded in a book, and then transferred to the “kirk-box,” the key of which was kept by the treasurer, who, in many of the old records, is called the “box-maister,” since he had to lug the box home to his own house for its greater security.

How much money was collected at the church

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doors in olden times? In an interesting chapter composed of extracts from the records of the kirk-session, we learn from Mr. Cramond's work that the collection for four consecutive Sundays at the parish church of Cullen for the year 1641 amounted to 20s., 16s., 24s., and 25s. 8d. But as Scots money in those days was only one-twelfth part the value of what it is now, it follows that the collections just mentioned represented 1s. 8d., 1s. 4d., 2s., and 2s. 1½d. per Sunday respectively. Not much, surely? No, not much; but the congregation would probably be small, and the coins put into the plate would be nearly all farthings. The minister had occasionally to intimate from the pulpit that the church-door collections were not so liberal as he could wish them to be. In 1674, as one learns from Dr. Edgar's book, the kirk-session of Kilmarnock placed on record the recommendation "that the minister exhort the people to extend their charities." A similar recommendation occurs in the kirk-session records of Falkirk, of date July 1696, as pointed out by Mr. Murray. In that month it was found that the "number of poor within the parish church does daily abound," whereupon the session "recommend to the minister to intimate to the congregation the next Lord's Day that they would be pleased to consider ye present strait . . . and be more charitable." Coming down to the year 1781, one finds that the collections for three consecutive Sundays in July in the parish church of Cullen were 5s. 4¾d., 6s. 2½d., and 6s. 3¾d. sterling money. There is here a distinct improvement.

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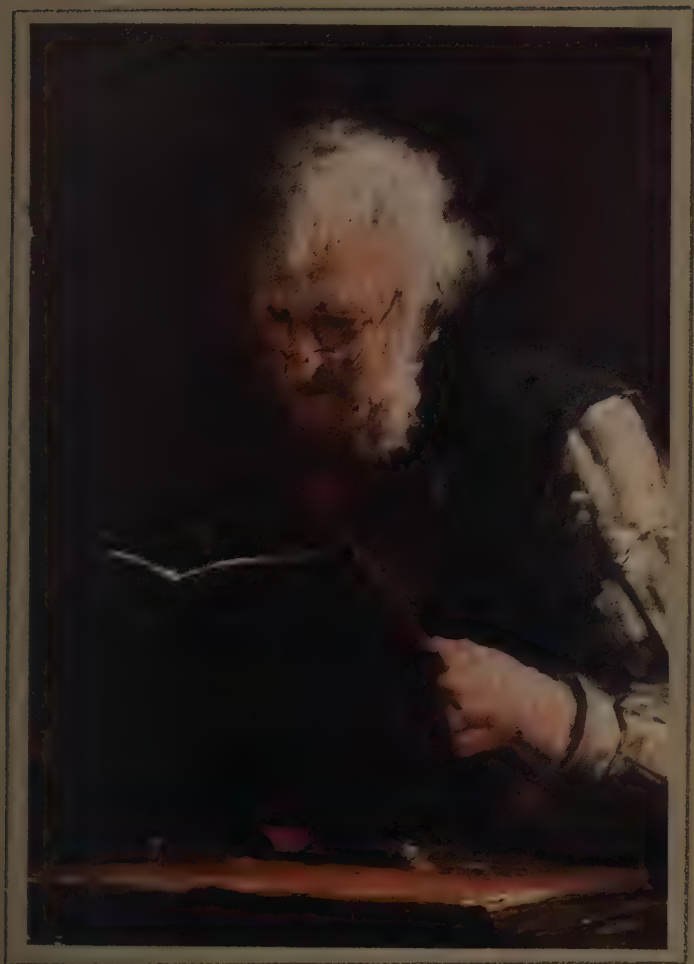
Sometimes in remote country districts, when the weather was rough and stormy, the amount collected at the door was so small that one can see the poor beadle wistfully eyeing the handful of coppers, and the heart of the elder at the plate being touched by the wistful look. On such occasions the elder would not transfer the collection to the box, for we find several entries in the records to the effect that "owing to the raininess of the day" the collection was so small that it was handed to the beadle. In the jubilee year of 1887 the beadle of the parish of Eaglesham also attained the jubilee of his office, and to mark the auspicious event, some friends gathered a sum of money and made a present of it to the old man. In returning thanks he remarked that when he accepted office the church-door collection averaged 1s. 9d. per Sunday, and that it was considered a great day when the treasurer bagged half a crown.

The collections were at first wholly bestowed upon the poor, and they continued to be so bestowed until other claims presented themselves. At stated intervals, generally once a quarter, the poor of each parish were summoned to the church, where the box was opened in presence of the minister and kirk-session. Each and every deserving case received attention, and the recipient was made happy by the gift of a small sum of money or its equivalent in provisions.

At these quarterly distributions of the church-door collections the session was often greatly annoyed, perplexed, and irritated by the presence of wandering beggars, who found their way to the church on these







HE WALKS A PORTION WIT' JUDEECIOUS CARE

By G. Paul Chalmers, R.S.A.



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occasions. Wherever the collections were being divided, thither were the beggars gathered together. With a pitiful look, and a still more pitiful whine, these poor creatures implored a share of what was being divided. But these requests were generally refused, on the ground, as the elder clearly pointed out, that what was given to strangers meant so much less to the deserving poor of each parish. And yet the elder's heart was often touched by the sight of so much wandering wretchedness, for entries like the following crop up every now and again in the treasurer's book: "A shilling to a puir decent-looking auld man"; another shilling to two "hirpling women, sairly needing something out of the box"; a penny to "a lass wi' a cruikit backbane"; and yet another penny to "a laddie wi' blackeen an' a white face." Dismissing these objects of compassion, we find that the poor in those days were divided, very much as they are divided now, into two classes—the regular pauper, and the man or woman whose own efforts had to be supplemented by a little timely help when sickness or misfortune overtook the household.

By and by other claims than those made by the poor were forced upon the attention of the treasurer and his colleagues of the session. For the support of these claims it was enacted by a proclamation of the Privy Council, of date 29th August 1693, that one-half of the sums collected at the church door was to be given to the poor as before, while the other half might be retained for the relief of sudden or temporary distress, or for other matters which might come under the

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consideration of each individual kirk-session throughout the country.

For example, here is an extract from the session records of Cullen Parish Church, and the extract is a gem in its way. It concerns an old pulpit Bible which has been banged, battered, and thumped by some Boanerges, until it is knocked out of shape and stands sadly in need of repair—if, indeed, it be not past mending altogether. The treasurer, however, takes the Bible in hand, gets it all neatly done up anew, and this is the way in which he records the expenditure incurred—

“1703.—For a calf's skinn to be a cover to ye Kirke bible, 7s. For dressing ye skinn bought to cover ye Kirke bible, and alm'd leither to fasten ye cover to ye brods, and for sowing thereof, 10s. For keepers to ye clasps, brass nails putting on ye stoods, and gluing loose leaves, 14s.” (Scots money).

The treasurer at the present day would make short work of such a transaction, and enter it in his cash-book as follows :—

Repairing Pulpit Bible, 2s. 7d.

In Mr. Tait's *Two Centuries of Border Church Life*, we get a picture of the elder's sympathy with the helpless and the distressed. In the parish of Morebattle, one William Idlington is apparently left with a motherless child, for we find the treasurer paying the sum of 12s. to Barbara Robson for taking care of the infant, and nursing it for some days after the loss of its mother. In the same year, 1732, and in the same parish, there follow several entries connected with the death and burial of a pauper, so real and graphic in their

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touch that they look like a page out of *Oliver Twist*. Poor Jean Hall falls into poverty, distress, and wretchedness. The treasurer sends her a cartload of coals, for which he pays 16s. In February following Jean seems to have died, for on the 16th of that month there was paid to James Robson in Kirk Yetholm the sum of £3, 14s. 3d. for "cheese, tobacco, and pipes," provided at the funeral. The digging of the grave, the crying of the deceased's effects at the roup, and the ringing of the "passing-bell" are all provided for by the treasurer out of his continually replenished and inexhaustible kirk-box.

In seaboard parishes the widows and children of seamen come in for a large share of the church-door collections. Discharged soldiers and disabled sailors are constantly knocking about the country, hankering and yearning after a little bit of help from the treasurer's box. The treasurer never seems to turn these objects empty away, God bless him. How can he withstand the earnest solicitations of such a case as that of a poor woman who was "neither able to work nor want"? Or how can he say "no" to the unfortunate whose wife has brought him three children at one birth, and all four doing as well as can be expected?

With all these demands upon the kirk-box it soon began to be felt that the Church must look out for additional sources of revenue. These sources lay ready to her hand, and she was not slow to avail herself of them. Perhaps the most fruitful of these sources was that derived from fines and penalties levied on parties subjected to the discipline of the session—a body

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whose influence was even stronger and further reaching than either the civil power or the local authority vested in the sheriff or the magistrates. For the members of the session were frequently members of the magistracy also ; and when it came to fining a woman for gathering dulse, or men for playing golf on Sundays, the magistrate dropped his authority and joined forces with the kirk-session. Town Councils were nowhere ; the members municipal played second fiddle to the members ecclesiastical, and the Church was supreme. Thus we find the case of a man who was up, not before the sheriff, not before the magistrate, but before the session, for having assaulted his wife with a spade. After evidence, led at great length, accused was fined a dollar, and bound over, not only to keep the peace in future, but also to express his regret, and to satisfy the session that he was sincere in that regret.

Having got its hand among the fines the session began to fine right and left. Every person who stayed away from church on Sunday was fined ; no excuse was taken. If an elder so far forgot himself as to remain at home on account of a bad headache he was fined two shillings ; if a deacon pleaded toothache as a reason for absenting himself from worship he was fined one shilling ; and persons of minor importance had to lay down their sixpence—all of which fines went into the treasurer's box, and sensibly increased his income.

A curious custom, among many curious customs of the old days, devolved upon the elder whose duty it was to stand at the plate on Sunday. After seeing

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the congregation all seated, or standing in their usual places, and after public worship had begun, the elder handed the collection to the treasurer, and went off on a round of visits through the town or village, in search of those whom he had not seen passing into church that morning. If the absentees were not in their homes the elder went to the alehouse, and if he found the delinquents there he took down their names, and warned them that for a second offence they would be reported to the session. Sometimes a second offence did follow; but Nemesis was on the track, and the inevitable fines were levied and paid.

Various other sources of revenue crop up in addition to those of fines and penalties. Somebody takes the grazing of the churchyard for his cows and sheep, and pays therefor a rent to the treasurer. The session hires out the mort-cloth or pall at funerals, and draws a revenue therefrom, and accounts for the same to the treasurer. In 1708 a general movement began throughout Scotland to place seats in the hitherto open and unoccupied area of the parish church. For liberty to place these pews or seats a rent was demanded of "half a crown for the use of the poor," and further "that the same be payed before the seats be set up."

Previous to this arrangement the worshippers brought stools or seats with them, which not seldom, as mentioned in Chapter One, were used as handy weapons in the event of personal disputes arising within or without the church. An unorthodox preacher ran the risk of having one or more of these "cutty stools" hurled at his head. Witness a notable instance

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of this in the case of the immortal Jenny Geddes in the Cathedral of St. Giles at Edinburgh.

Fixed pews were first looked upon as luxuries. They were originally erected by the heritors for their own use and for that of their tenants, but the accommodation was by no means sufficient for all. Accordingly, free fights over the pews were of common occurrence. Thus in a parish church in the North, in the year 1735, we find that John Porter was rebuked before the pulpit for thrusting James Connan out of a seat in church, wringing his nose, and thumping him on the back. John was heavily fined, and deservedly so.

Long ago the treasurer had his soul vexed within him by the amount of bad money that was unblushingly put into the plate every Sunday throughout the year. To no special locality was this scandal confined. It was practised all over Scotland, from the Shetland Isles to the Cheviot Hills, and so systematically was it done that the practice gave rise to a new phrase in common parlance—"not worth a doit." The doit was a Dutch coin of debased metal, and equivalent in value to the twelfth part of a penny only. Debased as it was, this coin was extensively circulated in Scotland, apparently for the sole purpose of being placed in the plate on Sundays. But the doit had companions in other spurious coins, and they generally met each other on Sundays. The officiating elder had always instructions to keep his eye on the parties who contributed such shameless offerings. It was difficult, however, for the elder to make good any case of detection among the crowd of worshippers passing into

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church, and who, to their honour be it said, did their best to cover the spurious coins by their own genuine offerings. But that the guilty parties were "spotted" now and then is clear from an anecdote which comes from Hawick. One Sunday morning a gaudily dressed young woman entered a church in the town, placed her offering in the plate, and went upstairs to a seat in the gallery. Scarcely had she got comfortably settled when the elder on duty approached, holding up a counterfeit coin, and exclaiming for the benefit of all concerned, "Here, ma woman, tak' back yer bad ha'penny. How daur ye offer the blin' an' lame to the Lord!"

From the Border country comes another collection anecdote in this connection. In this case, however, there was no attempt at concealment, since the offender offered a spurious coin with a special purpose, and gloried in the act. He lived in Lauder; and, on the occasion referred to, went one day to the Seceders' meeting-house, where he put a bad shilling in the collection-ladle and took out elevenpence halfpenny. In great glee this so-called "idiot" afterwards went to Lord Lauderdale and said, "I've cheated the Seceders the day, my lord; I've cheated the Seceders."

To such an extent did bad money accumulate in the hands of the treasurer that he had to lay it aside and sell it in bulk for whatever price it would bring. Sometimes a man would turn up in a district with a horse and cart, making offers for the bad copper or pewter that had been laid aside. At other times the spurious money would be sent to an open market and there sold to the highest bidder. In 1774 there were

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over seven stones' weight of this truly "filthy lucre" sold in the market-place of Keith, and its price was £2, 18s. 6d., less 4s. for carriage from Banff. Truly might the treasurer hold up his hands and say with the Apostle Paul, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil."

In order to counteract as far as possible the practice of putting spurious money into the plate, the various presbyteries under one synod used occasionally to combine, send as much as £100 sterling to the mint in London, and ask that the amount be exchanged for farthings, and returned with "the first sure messenger." Incidentally we learn from this that the farthing played an important part in the collections of former days. This was a small offering, no doubt; but better one good and honest farthing than a hundredweight of doits.

As these church records come down the stream of time, they bring with them now and again some passing incident of Scottish contemporaneous history. On the 28th August 1646 a collection was made in the parish church of Auchterhouse for the people of Cullen who had suffered much from the burning of their town by the Marquis of Montrose on his march northward. In 1746 the beadle of Falkirk implored the kirk-session to lend him a crown, as he had undergone some rather harsh treatment at the hands of Prince Charlie's Highlanders on their disastrous retreat from England, only a few weeks previous to the still more disastrous affair at Culloden. In 1805 a general collection was made throughout Scotland for the widows

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and children of these seamen who had fallen at Trafalgar; and in 1815 there was another national collection, on which occasion the treasurer at Falkirk remitted to London the sum of £23, 3s. for the Waterloo Fund.

As the Poor Law came into operation great changes followed—changes which affected the Church in a way she little dreamed of. Hitherto she had taken the entire oversight of the poor. Now the law stepped in, took the poor out of her hand, and left her with those only who cared to ask for help when it was urgently needed, and who would, on no consideration, ask it out of the public rates. The minister and the kirk-session gradually felt their former influence slipping away from them. The care of the poor had been the very safety of the Church. But now the landlords or heritors and the ratepayers had to do what the session had formerly done. With a soured and disappointed look the elder took his place by the plate on Sundays, feeling the loss of former influence and dignity. He watched the congregation passing into church, not with the pleased and humorous expression that had formerly lighted his countenance and glistened in his eye, but with a sour demure look that seemed ready to break out into fault-finding over something or other.

The elder at the plate in the Parish Church of Old Monkland observed that a wealthy landowner passed in one Sunday morning after throwing down only a penny. This the elder could not stand. "Come back, laird," he called aloud, "come back. Ye maun do mair for the plate than that. I'll no' tak' it off yer hand." In this case history says that the contribution was

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largely increased—probably by the substitution of a sixpence or a shilling for the offending penny. But as if to show how sublime a thing it was for the elder to do his duty, the spirit of liberality seems to have remained in the district to this day, for on Sunday, 11th May 1890, the total amount collected at the re-opening of Airdrie Parish Church was the handsome and liberal sum of £161, 12s. 6d.

It was in the year 1773 that the citizens of Glasgow were first assessed for the maintenance of the poor—the amount levied and collected being only £336 5s. 1d. Generally speaking, this assessment, or poor-rate, was at first cheerfully paid, but it soon became evident that the demands for the poor were gradually getting heavier and heavier. People began to sigh when they remembered how cheaply they had got off by chucking their bawbee into the plate at the church door. They preferred the treasurer to the collector. But the die was cast, and the Poor Law had to be obeyed.

The elder at the plate, however, did not go to the wall, nor did the ancient institution of the church-door collection share the fate of all changing things. The elder renewed his youth, and asserted his presence at the plate even more pronouncedly than before. He created quite a commotion one Sunday morning in the lobby of St. Enoch's Church, Glasgow. The elder, on the occasion referred to, happened to be also one of the magistrates of the city and a member of the recently constituted Parochial Board for the relief of the poor. In the latter capacity he had refused to in-

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terest himself in an application on the part of Lady Betty Cunningham on behalf of an aged domestic servant. So incensed was her ladyship by this refusal, that one Sunday morning she declined to put anything into the plate when she observed who was standing beside it. She simply contented herself with a profound and formal bow in passing. The elder was at a loss to understand this excess of politeness; but suddenly recollecting the probable cause of pique, he followed Lady Betty as she sailed in magnificence up the aisle, and addressing her in a tone intended to be heard by the whole congregation, said, "Gie us less o' yer manners, my lady, an' mair o' yer siller."

By and by the elder at the plate seemed to get over his little bit of huff about the Poor Law, and we find a return to the humour of former days. Thus at the village of Muthill, the elder, while going round with the ladle, used to remind such members of the congregation as seemed backward in their duty by touching them up with the said ladle, and exhorting them, in an audible tone, to "Mind the puir." And it was in no vague or impersonal manner that he did so, for he occasionally singled out the object of his attention by such observations as the following: "Wife, sittin' next the wee lassie there, mind the puir. Lass, wi' the braw plaid, mind the puir." The puir here mentioned were not those who had been taken over as paupers by the Parochial Board, but the struggling and deserving poor connected with the congregation.

It was a trying ordeal thus to be singled out when the ladle was approaching and held up for a contribu-

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tion. It might be all very well when the "bawbee" or the penny was ready ; but what a position for any mortal man, or woman either, to be in when the coin was forgotten. In a country church one day one of the elders actually forgot to put his penny into his "Sunday pocket," and when the ladle made its appearance he had nothing for it. After getting home he was reciting the cause of his misery to his wife, and bewailing his untoward fate, when his son, a boy of eight or nine, cheered him much by this advice : "Man, faither, what's the use o' mournin' owre that bit job. Ye should hae done what Jims the precentor does when he forgets his ha'penny—he jist gies a nod, and the ladle passes on."

Sometimes the humorous incidents took place beside the plate itself. A certain laird in Fife, though "rich and increased in goods," did not show any increase in liberality, but continued to throw in the accustomed penny. One Sunday morning he unintentionally slipped a crown into the plate; but, discovering his mistake before he reached the pew, he returned, and was about to take back the crown and replace it by the penny. The elder was too many for him, however. "Stop, laird," he cried. "Ye may put *in* what ye like, but ye maun take naething *out*." The laird explained, but the elder was firm. "Aweel," said the former, "I'll get credit in heaven for the crown." "Na, na," was the ready reply. "Ye'll only get credit for the penny."

The elder at the plate in an east country church used to be much annoyed by one of the parishioners

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habitually asking change, and contributing only a penny when he got it. "Ou ay, I can gie ye change," said the elder one morning. "But we canna stand here Sabbath after Sabbath changing money without a wee bit profit. There's a penny. The other eleven can lie in the plate to pay for past business." That probably put an end to the money-changing transactions at that church door.

But the humour did not always rest with the elder on such occasions, for the officiating clergyman himself has been known to have a turn at it. It is told of a famous Edinburgh divine, familiarly known as "Wee Scotty o' the Coogate Kirk," that one Sunday when there was a great noise made by the people in going to their seats he broke out as follows: "Oh, that I could hear the pennies birlin' in the plate at the door wi' half the noise ye mak' wi' yer cheepin' shoon. Oh, that Paul had been here wi' a long wooden ladle, for yer coppers are strangers in a far country, an' as for yer silver an' yer gold—let us pray!"

A tale is told of Doctor Dabster, "an unco bitter body when there was a sma' collection." Before the sermon began the beadle used to hand him up a slip of paper stating the amount collected. One day the whole collection only reached three shillings and ninepence, and this the Doctor could not get over. He stopped in the delivery of his discourse, made a long pause, and thus delivered himself. "It's the Land o' Canawn ye're striving after: the Land of Canawn, eh? Three an' ninepence. Yes, ye're sure to gang there. I think I see ye! Nae doot ye think yersels

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on the richt road for't. Ask yer consciences an' see what *they'll* say. Ask them, an' see what they *wull* say. I'll tell ye. Three miserable shillings and ninepence is puir passage money for sic a lang journey. What! Three an' ninepence! As weel micht a coo gang up a tree, tailforemost, an' whistle like a mavis, as ye get to Canawn for three an' ninepence."

The collection is inseparable from public worship, just as the act of public worship refuses to be separated from the collection. What could be happier than the reply of the bishop who went to preach a sermon on behalf of a special collection in a country church one Sunday morning. "I'm grieved that you should get such a breezy, blowy day to come here," said the resident clergyman, referring to the weather. "Tuts, tuts," replied his lordship, "what did I come here for but to raise the wind?"

At the opening of a new church the officiating clergyman favoured the congregation with a minute description of the structural features of the building in which they were assembled that morning for the first time. It was in the Ionic style, he remarked. Then he added, "Over the portico is a tower; over that a cupola; and on the top of all a mortgage; which last, my friends," the preacher concluded, "being contrary to the rules of architectural proportion, as laid down by Professor Vitruvius, I hope to see soon removed by a liberal collection."

After a little bit of humour there sometimes follows a slight touch of sarcasm. At a game of nap, Brown won, and Parson Robinson paid his loss in three pen-

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nies. "Ha, ha, Robinson," said Brown, "been robbing the church plate, eh!" "Ah," replied the parson, "you recognise your miserable little contributions, do you?"

Not very long ago, in London, a preacher indulged in a little bit of sarcasm over a small collection, and he did it very neatly. "When I look at the congregation," said he, "I ask, where are the poor? And when I look at the collection I ask, where are the rich?"

Small collections are often the cause of sarcastic observation. Thus, a beadle was asked one day why the minister had so frequently employed the expression "miserable sinners" in his prayers that morning. "Maybe it was owin' tae the sma'ness of the collection," was the practical reply.

Again, the smallness of the collection is no doubt also to be held responsible for the address delivered by a clergyman in New York whose congregation had the reputation of being wealthy but not liberal. This good man had been doing his best to get the poor people to come to church, but he does not seem to have succeeded, if one reads between the lines of the following address: "I have tried to reach the poor of this place," said the clergyman one Sunday morning, "and done everything I could to induce them to come to this church to break with us the bread of life. I infer from the amount of to-day's collection—seven dollars, thirty-five cents—*that they have come.*"

It must have been the frequency of the collections, small or great, in the Free Church, that ultimately induced one of her members to return to the Establishment shortly after the Disruption. Meeting this mem-

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berone day, his former minister remarked, "Aye, man, John, an' ye've left us. What might your reason be for that? Did ye think it wasna a guid road we were gaun?" "Oh, I daursay it was a guid eneuch road, an' a braw road; but, eh meenister, the tolls were unco heavy."

It is interesting to note the part that is taken by the various coins of the realm in the matter of church collections. The first offering recorded in the New Testament, as we have seen, is that of the poor widow who "threw in two mites, which make a farthing." In the olden times in Scotland, the farthing played a conspicuous part; and down to some twenty-five years ago it had by no means disappeared from the church collection. At that time in Shetland, in the parish of Whalsay, the coin usually put into the ladle was a farthing. These farthings were exchanged at the local shop for silver, and the idea occurred to the clergyman of making "a corner" in farthings by hoarding up those received in the collections. His idea was that the people would, owing to the ensuing scarcity of farthings, be compelled to use coins of a higher denomination. However, the experiment was not tried, as he was informed that the only effect would be that the people would give nothing at all.

A commentary on the lack of liberality among congregations is supplied in the following story related by the late Professor Blackie: "I used to sit," says the Professor, "regularly in Dr. Guthrie's church in the elders' seat, and one day the Doctor preached such a telling discourse that I said to the office-bearer sit-

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ting next to me, 'My usual offering is one shilling, but to-day the fervour of the Doctor's eloquence has been such that I make it half a crown.' The answer was, 'Professor Blackie, I have served as deacon in this church for more than twenty years, and I can safely say that there are two-thirds of the congregation whom no pulpit appeal, however strong, could induce to give more than the customary penny.' The penny is therefore the orthodox mite."

During the week the threepenny leads a comparatively easy and uneventful existence, but it wakens up into activity on Sundays. It is silver, and therefore more pretentious than copper, but after all there is little in it. Even in week-night meetings where a collection in silver is asked, the intimation has occasionally to be supplemented by this reminder that "threepenny pieces do not cover expenses." This is plain speaking, but honest truth, and so the threepenny has come to be regarded more as a shabby-genteel piece of money than one possessing much real value or intrinsic worth.

The sixpence runs the threepenny pretty hard at the ordinary collections on Sunday—sometimes outnumbering it, and sometimes falling below it. An eminently respectable bit of money is the sixpence—neither so pretentious as the shilling, nor so insignificant as the threepenny. Most people who put sixpence in the plate think they are doing uncommonly well. It suits those who do not consider themselves rich, and it pleases those who do not count themselves poor. But custom has much to do even in the matter of contributing to the plate, for it has been remarked, by some

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acute observer in the church lobby, that if nine persons pass the plate and throw in only a penny, the tenth will hesitate about the sixpence he had ready, and will, at the last moment, replace it by a penny too. The truth of this observation is borne out by an incident which happened at Inverness a year or two ago. A stranger while visiting the Highland Capital went to one of the churches on Sunday morning, and was much struck by the large size of the collecting-plate at the door, and the tremendous quantity of coppers that was being placed in it. His own contribution was sixpence, but in a letter written to the newspapers next day he said that as his sixpence seemed to be the only one in the lot he got no good of the service because of the feeling that he had been not only needlessly extravagant, but that he had been done out of five-pence!

In regard to notes and gold, they so seldom appeared in the plate at the ordinary collections that one can easily condone the harmless little bit of vanity on the part of a certain gentleman in the North, who, afraid that his liberality might be overlooked, remarked, in passing the elder at the plate, "Take care o' that wee bit o' paper, an' see that it disna blaw awa'."

It may be interesting to analyse a modern collection. At a special Masonic service held in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, the collection was as follows:—

2 £1 notes	.	.	.	£2	0	0
3 sovereigns	.	.	.	3	0	0
8 half-sovereigns	.	.	.	4	0	0
13	.	Carry forward	.	£9	0	0

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13 . Brought forward .	£9	0	0
2 crown pieces . . .	0	10	0
52 half-crowns . . .	6	10	0
90 florins . . . .	9	0	0
300 shillings . . . .	15	0	0
649 sixpences . . . .	16	4	6
439 threepennies . . .	5	9	9
328 pennies . . . .	1	7	4
88 halfpennies . . .	0	3	8
3 foreign coins valued at	0	0	9
1964 pieces, amounting to .	<u>£63</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>0</u>

It is not a far cry from the ordinary to the special collection. Some sermons on the latter occasions are extra long; while others, it is but fair to say, are extra short. It is related of Dean Swift that he once preached a charity sermon, the length of which so irritated many of his hearers that they remonstrated with him on the matter. On a subsequent occasion he preached another sermon of the same kind, and this time many of his hearers thought he was too short—so difficult it is to please everybody. The Dean's text was longer than his sermon:—"He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and that which he hath given will be repaid to him again." "Now, my friends," continued the preacher, "you hear the terms of the loan. If you like the security, down with the dust." It is recorded that the collection which followed this quaintest and shortest of sermons was eminently satisfactory.

Special services for special collections are not ar-

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ranged without many anxious preliminaries as to the selection of preachers, and the days or hours fixed for the service. In the vestry of Augustine congregational Church, Edinburgh, the late Dr. Lindsay Alexander and his Deacons were discussing the subject as to whether a service at which a special collection was wished should be held on Sunday afternoon or evening. Dr. Alexander had just said that personally he would prefer the afternoon, when the beadle, who had been mending the vestry fire, paused for a moment, coal-scuttle in hand, and facing round said, "The Doctor's richt. In the afternoon we'll hae oor ain folk. At nicht there'll be a wheen Presbyterians. I reckon *them* at threepence the dizzen." The beadle did not wait to see the effect of his shot, but it ended the discussion.

After a collection in a country congregation on behalf of the Jewish Missions of the Free Church, the officiating minister inquired of the deacon if the offerings amounted to much. "'Deed no," was the canny reply. "I would advise the Jews tae fa' back on something o' their ain, for a' that's here'll no help them muckle."

In the *Statistical Account of Scotland* the minister of Nairn states that "the weekly collection at the church on Sundays amounted to about three shillings in good copper." But the deponent sayeth not how much of the collection was *bad*. The silence is ominous and suggestive.

To no one country in particular is the special collection confined. It turns up everywhere, and under

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the most unexpected circumstances. At the Judson centennial anniversary in America in 1888 the following anecdote was related by Dr. Edward Judson :—

“Just after the second battle of Bull Run, when communication was cut off by the telegraph being down, the people in the South were in a feverish state of anxiety to get news. At length a letter arrived at the post office in Lexington, the home of Stonewall Jackson, addressed to his old pastor. It was in the General’s handwriting, and all were impatient to have it read, so that they might know how the battle had gone. But when the seal was broken only this was found:— ‘ Dear Pastor,—*I remember that this is the day of the collection for Foreign Missions.* Please find enclosed my cheque.—T. J. JACKSON.’ ”

It is not often that one comes across a good ghost story in these days which produce far more wonderful things than ghosts ; and about the last connection in which one would dream of meeting a ghost is that of the special collection. Nevertheless, here is the story :—A clergyman visiting at a certain house in the country was told, half in joke and half in earnest, that the bedroom he was to occupy for the night had the evil reputation of being haunted. Nothing daunted, the clergyman retired to rest. At breakfast next morning he was asked how he had rested. “ Oh, very well,” he said. “ Any disturbance ? ” “ Oh yes.” “ What—the ghost ? ” “ Yes.” “ Then it’s all true.” “ Quite true.” “ Did it speak ? ” “ No, but I spoke.” “ And what did you say ? ” “ Well, as the apparition stood

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beside me I sat up in bed, and said that we were building a new church. I had my collecting book with me, and would be glad if he could see his way to put down his name for a subscription." "And what did he say?" "Nothing. Whereupon I said that if he didn't see his way to put down his name for a subscription there was to be a *special collection* soon. At the mere mention of the special collection the figure instantly disappeared. I then lay down in bed, fell sound asleep, awoke quite refreshed, and feel in capital trim to do justice to this good breakfast."

It is curious to contrast collections: to bring together the great and the small—the liberal and the miserable. A worthy old farmer lately heard a young minister preaching in the parish of Ruthven. Both preacher and farmer were afterwards invited by the resident clergyman to dine at the manse, and the conversation, at or after dinner, turned upon church-door collections.

Addressing the young preacher, the farmer gave him this advice—"When ye get a kirk o' yer ain dinna expeck big collections. Ye see, I was for twal year an elder, and had to stand at the plate. I mind fine the first Sabbath after the Disruption,—though our twa worthy ministers didna gang oot,—and the strange feelin' about me as I took my place at the plate for the first time. I was at yin o' the doors o' St. Andrews Parish Kirk. Noo, hoo muckle d'ye think I got that day?"

"Oh well, I know the church nicely—seated for at least two thousand—you might get two pounds."

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“Wadye believe it? I only got five bawbees, stan-nin’ in the dracht for twenty minutes, too. If I had only kenned I wad rather hae pit in the whole collection myself an’ covered up the plate. Mind, dinna expeck big collections.”

Large collections do not always imply large congregations. A correspondent of the *British Weekly* some years ago stated that he had recently preached in a remote district of the West Highlands to a congregation of only forty-eight persons, and that the collection, though no special appeal was made, amounted to £2, 5s. 8d., and contained only thirteen coppers. The correspondent added that the congregation was made up of farmers, shepherds, gamekeepers, and their families. No matter how made up, they did their duty by the collection, and deserve honourable mention in these pages.

Dr. Barnardo’s Homes in London seem to be largely supported by donations and collections in kind. On the occasion of a visit to Scotland, his representative received from a guid wife at Inverness three fine guinea pigs, to be sold, and the money devoted to “the puir bairns.” At Edinburgh a working man had only a penny when a collection was made, but he afterwards waited on Dr. Barnardo’s representative and asked his acceptance of half a sovereign. At Helensburgh a collection was made for the starving millions of China, and when counted it amounted to £20 and a gold ring. Edward Irving, on one occasion, put his gold watch into the plate. There is also on record a unique collection made at Port Moseley, New Guinea,

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as reported in the *Free Church Monthly* for March 1892:—

Cash . . . . .	£20	1	6
325 spears, 65 shell armlets, 92 bows, 180 arrows, besides shields, drums, shell necklaces, feather and other ornaments, valued at . . . . .		10	0 0
	<u>£30</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>

In considering incidents and anecdotes relating to the church-door collections, one is impressed by the almost total absence of reference to the temptation that sometimes besets the treasurer during his tenure of office. Once or twice, but only once or twice, one meets with an allusion to some irregularity that may have crept into the cash and book-keeping. It is true that Burns accuses "Holy Willie" of pilfering the church-door collections, but Dr. Edgar, in *Old Church Life in Scotland*, states that there is no trace of any such misdemeanour in the kirk-session records of the parish of Mauchline.

Another poet, the author of "Horace in Home-spun," comes across the subject of temptation at the church-plate, and thus expresses his indignation at the conduct of an unworthy elder—

He's fairly aff, he's stown awa',  
A wolf that wore a fleece, man.  
He's cheated justice, jinkit law,  
An' lauch'd at the policeman.  
The mission fund, the parish rate,  
He had the haill control o't,  
The very pennies in the plate,  
He's skirtit wi' the whole o't.

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From the records of Falkirk Parish, Mr. Murray quotes a number of resolutions which seem to have been intended to protect the session from some irregularities that had arisen in connection with the collections. At the same time there was apparently no inclination to overlook bygones, for it is recorded in the minute-book that while the session "did exoner John Monteath that 3 lbs. Qlk he did collect," they came down upon Patrick Quidlatt and Alex. Watt with that "19s. that was wanting in the compts." It is not likely that Patrick and Alexander would soon hear the end of the "19s. that was wanting," since the session placed on record the incident of its loss, and the tale is not told of its ever having been found. If we except this allusion to the treasurer and his difficulty at Falkirk—or at least to the two elders whom he appointed to stand at the plate—we have come across no more irregularities.

In a Highland parish the church-officer used frequently to express the opinion that the collection was much better spent long ago when it was devoted entirely to the poor. This opinion was generally given while the treasurer was counting the money previous to its being deposited in a box which was left in charge of the minister, who placed it, *and the key*, in a particular part of the session-house press known only to himself and the beadle.

On one occasion the treasurer reported a deficiency, and stated that somebody must have been intramitting with the money in the box. The minister afterwards summoned the beadle, and thus broke the

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matter in solemn secrecy :—" David, there's something wrong with the box. The treasurer tells me that some one has been taking money out of it. You know very well that no person has access to the box but you and myself." Thinking that he had David in a corner the minister looked him steadily in the face, and paused for a reply. " Weel, sir," said David coolly, " if there's ony defeeshency, it's for you an' me tae mak' it up atween's, an' say naething mair about it."

In somewhat similar circumstances an Orcadian minister used the superstitions of his people to find out who had taken money out of the box that held the collections. One Sunday, when the treasurer went to open the box, he found it empty. In great astonishment he reported the matter to the minister, declaring at the same time that he knew nothing whatever about the theft, and desiring that he, the treasurer, might be searched there and then.

" Na, na, Jeems," replied the minister. " No one's doubting you. But never mind the money. If it's within the ring of the Ronsay *I'll have it back before next Sunday.*"

Now, the last man to leave the church on Sunday nights was, of course, the church-officer. On the night in question the minister remained a little later than usual, and walked homeward with him. " This is an awkward thing that's happened me, Tam," said he; " and it will make me do the thing I'd rather leave undone."

" Ay, sir, an' what's that ?"

" Oh, just to raise the deevil; and he'll come to the man that took the money, either in a wind that'll

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neither leave him leaf nor sheaf, or wi' a rope to hang him owre his ain door."

Not a word said Tam in reply, and when they reached the manse gate minister and beadle bade each other good-night. At that season of the year—the dead of winter—Tam used to rise early in the morning, and thrash corn in a barn that was near his own house. One night the minister's man, as instructed by his master, went to the barn and suspended from the open joisting overhead a rope with a running noose on it. Then he concealed himself among the straw all night, and waited Tam's appearance the following morning.

By and by the suspected man arrived, and when he lighted the candle to begin his day's work the first thing he saw was a dangling rope with a noose, and his own shadow big and black on the wall. Terrified, Tam fled from the place, took to bed, and never moved till broad daylight. When he returned to the barn the rope was gone. But Conscience was there.

Before the end of that week the minister heard that the beadle had been seen going in the direction of the church very late one night. When Sunday came the treasurer was directed to open the collection box, and there, sure enough, was every penny that ought to be.

All was kept quiet. The minister said not a word of what he had done, and it was not till after his death, and Tam's as well, that the way in which the missing money had been restored was made known, and how the minister had played the devil "for one night only."

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What delightful humour the genial author of *A Window in Thrums* throws around the plate in the Auld Licht Kirk of that now famous town. Unlike most others, this plate is not placed at the door, nor is it presided over by an office-bearer, but it stands "inside the church, so that the whole congregation can give a guess at what you give. If it is something very stingy or very liberal, all Thrums knows of it in a few hours. Indeed, this holds good of all the churches, especially, perhaps, of the Free one, which has been called the bawbee kirk, because so many halfpennies find their way into the plate." The author then describes some of the curious ways the villagers had of tipping their penny into the Auld Licht plate. There was Tommy Todd, for instance, who "did it much as a boy fires a marble, and there was quite a talk in the congregation the first time he missed." Old Snecky Hobart, too, "once dropped a penny into the plate and took out a halfpenny in change." Standing in the way of the congregation crowding to their pews, the Auld Licht plate was liable to accidents, but its historian informs us that the only untoward thing that happened "was once when the lassie from the farm of Curly Bog capsized it in passing."

Church literature is redolent and suggestive of the plate on almost every page. Reports, magazines, monthlies, records, and such-like, are generally not regarded as the most entertaining kind of reading to those not specially interested in the subjects under report. To most people, indeed, the long array of money columns, with their figures standing in grim position

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opposite the names of each particular church in congregational magazines, is only a repetition of the scene in the valley of dry bones, which appeared in the vision of the prophet. But if the modern seer will only look behind these figures, he will see there an "exceeding great army" of men, women, and children, full of life, hope, and energy, all converging every Sunday toward a series of common centres, not only to join in public worship, but also to practise one of the foremost graces of the Christian character—the grace of cheerful and willing giving. Perhaps the most practical demonstration of that grace ever seen in Scotland was witnessed at the opening of Wellington United Presbyterian Church, Glasgow, when the collections at the services on Saturday and Sunday, 11th and 12th October 1884, amounted to £11,277.

The Senior or Ruling Elder had further duties than merely attending to collections. It was his task to accompany his minister when desired, to the meeting of Presbytery, and support him in anything affecting the welfare of the church. But we read of one reverend gentleman of headstrong nature, who would never submit to the *dicta* of a session, and accordingly represented and discharged all the duties of minister and elder in his own person. On a certain occasion he was riding from home, and was followed, without his knowledge, by a bull stirk, which kept close at the heels of his horse. A countryman, noticing the circumstances, slyly observed, as the minister was passing him, "I'm thinkin' ye'll be gaun to the Presbytery to-day, sir?" "What makes you think so?" asked

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the minister. "Just because ye hae got your ruling elder behind ye."

On one occasion an elder who was new to the work was deputed from Strathaven Session to attend, with the minister, a meeting of the Hamilton Presbytery. A young man came before them, and delivered a trial discourse on the subject that had been prescribed to him, and the reverend incumbent from Strathaven was the first to offer remarks upon it. "The discourse which we have just heard," said he, addressing the Moderator, "does credit to our young friend for his proficiency in the English language; but it occurs to me that he has, in his illustrations, entirely missed the scope of the Apostle's meaning." When the minister sat down after concluding his criticism his elder thought it his bounden duty not only to give his opinion, but also to coincide with his minister's views. Accordingly he followed immediately, and remarked, "I perfectly agree wi' my minister in what he has said anent the young man's discourse, that it has been weel aneuch putten thegither, but that he has missed the scope of the Apostle." Some of the elder's neighbours who knew that he was ready on the slightest occasion to "throw bye his beuk, and speak about beasts," questioned him about his opinion after the meeting had been dissolved. "We're pleased to see ye sae learned amang the ministers, John," said they, "but how did ye ken the lad had missed the scope o' his text?" "Weel," answered John, "was I no' richt tae side wi' my minister? He couldna be wrang. I aye gang alang wi' him, and I ne'er found myself wrang

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yet." "But suppose the Moderator had asked ye what ye understood by the scope o' the Apostle?" "Ay, but he didna do't. An' gin he had, I would soon hae sco'pit mysel' out at the door."

But elders sometimes attended the Presbytery meeting for other purposes than merely to support their minister. A deservedly popular minister was so famed for his persuasive eloquence that he was often called upon to take services on public occasions so as to draw larger audiences and thus increase the collections; or else to make a special impression on the minds of the members of a particular church. In consequence, his own pulpit was frequently occupied by strangers. One day he was riding to the Presbytery meeting when he overtook two of his own elders going in the same direction. "Whaur awa', my friends, this day?" "We're gaun up tae the Presbytery like yersel', sir." "Ay! What may be taking ye up there, if it's a fair question? For I think there's nae matter frae our session to come before them." "'Deed, sir, tae be plain wi' ye, we are just gaun up tae petition for a hearing o' our ain minister."

On pastoral visitations the elder sometimes accompanied his minister, and his worldly wisdom was occasionally useful.

One minister, while going his rounds accompanied by the elder of the district, called upon a half-conscientious countryman who, when asked if he held worship in his family morning and evening, equivocated thus: "Ye see, sir, I'm often awa' frae hame—I maun be aff in the morning before the weans are oot

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o' their beds—an' when I come hame at nicht they're a' sleepit again. And I maun say, sir, 'deed I maun, that it's maistly on Sundays." "But, John, you must surely be sometimes present with your family both ends of the day, and I hope on those occasions you do not omit the performance of this duty?" John, who could not afford to tell a lie, although he could omit the duty, still waived the question. "Ay, it's a' true, verra true, sir, but really you see, sir, as I was saying afore—I maun say it's maistly on Sundays."

The next person visited was an Irishman, who apparently carried out the whole duty of man—at least according to his own story. The final question was, "And you never omit family worship, morning or night?" "Never, sir."

This was all beautiful to the minister, but the elder knew the world rather better, and, after leaving the house, he remarked, "Weel, sir, if ye dinna see ony difference between these two men that ye hae visited, I do. The first canna tell ye a lie, although he would let ye gang awa' believing yin. The ither is everything, according tae himsel', that ye could wish. Now to my certain knowledge the Bible and he seldom shake hands together, though he says otherwise to you. Glib i' the tongue is aye glaiket at the heart. Thae Paddies are no' tae ride the ford on. Neither is oor ain kintra folk, wha hae mair hums and ha's than usual. I wouldna speir owre mony questions. Just caution them weel."

From which disquisition one may learn that wisdom is of varying kinds; and that a master of theology







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By Gourlay Steele, R.S.A.



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may be but a poor judge of human nature. It was possibly a knowledge of this fact that caused the minister of a prominent Edinburgh congregation to approach a leading member of his congregation with a request that he should take up the office of the eldership. The prospective elder, however, showed no enthusiasm ; and, in fact, demurred strongly to accepting the proffered dignity.

"But, Mr. —," said the minister, "you are a man of position in the city and in the congregation ; and I think that you should esteem it not only a duty to accept the eldership, but a very high privilege to be requested to join the session of a congregation of such high standing as ours."

"That's all very well, Doctor," was the reply, "but I feel that I am not just fitted for the post."

"In what way ?" asked the Doctor.

"Well, the fact is I'm a perfect devil to swear."

Fortunately in this case the weakness of the suggested elder was widely known, and although ineradicable yet it did not suffice to obscure his other outstanding gifts. In consequence, the Doctor had the good sense to overlook the failing, and his session was the stronger by a recruit with a wide knowledge of men and affairs.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE BEADLE



THE ANCIENT OFFICE OF THE DOOR-keeper was, no doubt, the germ out of which grew the higher development of the modern beadle. The former office is of very ancient date, and probably had its origin when Moses pitched the Tabernacle as a visible symbol of the Divine Presence in the midst of Israel in the wilderness. In the shrine afterwards reared at Shiloh, in the splendour and magnificence of the Temple service in Jerusalem, in the synagogues of Galilee and Judea, and in the Early Christian Church, we see the doorkeeper discharging the lowly duties required of him. And if we leave the mainstream of ecclesiastical history and find our way back to Scotland in pre-Reformation times, we shall find him still at his post, but dignified by his official title of *Ostiarius*—the doorkeeper.

In the Roman Catholic Church the *Ostiarius* seems to have been regularly ordained to the office, and to have been officially recognised as a member of the ecclesiastical staff. His instructions were to be in regular attendance at church, to open the doors at certain hours to the faithful, and to close them at all hours against the unfaithful. All heretics he was to expel, and all excommunicated persons he was to prevent coming near the church at all. Generally, he was to see that neither buying nor selling was carried on in church, to exclude all beggars, to drive out dogs, to waken sleepers, and maintain due order in time of public worship.

After the Reformation in Scotland the *Ostiarius*

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appears again, but greatly changed, and bearing upon him the marks of the fiery trials he had come through. Though reduced in status ecclesiastically, he was yet raised socially. No longer was he ordained to the office, and recognised as one of the clergy ; he was, however, chosen from the lay element of the congregation, and appointed to higher duties than those pertaining merely to keeping the doors of the church, and maintaining discipline and order during the observance of public worship. Though, of course, he had instructions still to discharge these duties, he was, at the same time, called upon to do something higher—he became the servant of the minister, the officer of the kirk-session, and gradually rose to a position that turned out to be perfectly unique, *per se*, and without a parallel in the social history of his countrymen. Everything in the Reformed Church was different from what it had been in pre-Reformation times. Reaction was in the air ; and the Ostiarius came in for his share of the changes that were going on everywhere around him. No longer was he called by that high-sounding name, but by Bedellus, the latinised form of beadle—a word used in the common language of the time to designate any person whose duty it was to summon parties before a public court, and answer any charge that may have been laid against them. The popular instinct in selecting such a name was singularly correct, as we shall see by and by ; for the new officer in the Reformed Church had far more to do with summoning parties before the kirk-session than with doorkeeping. The title of Bedellus speed-

## THE BEADLE: HIS ORIGIN & DUTIES

ily fell into disuse, for it was found to be far too grand a name "to gang tae kirk wi'," and so it soon slid back to beadle, with its unpoetic provincialisms of beddle, bedral, betheral, and such-like.

For many years after the Reformation in Scotland the ancient office of the mere doorkeeper fell into disuse. In later times, however, it was found that in towns and cities the beadle could not possibly attend to everything connected with the comfort and convenience of a large congregation assembled for public worship. Accordingly the services of the doorkeeper were again called into requisition, and the person or persons so employed were placed under the charge of the beadle, thereby setting him up another step in the social scale. He had not the appointment of the doorkeeper in his own hand, however, as the kirk-session retained that privilege. There are few records of these appointments, and even such as exist contain little or nothing of public interest. There is one exception worth noting here, and it occurs in the records of St. James's Parish Church, Glasgow. The minister, the Rev. Dr. Muir, was most scrupulous as to character and conduct in the case of every one employed about the church. During a discussion over the matter of appointing an additional doorkeeper, a member of session remarked that the person recommended for the post was only to be a poor and lowly pew-opener. "What of that!" cried Dr. Muir. "We read in the Bible that in the Temple service the very snuffers behaved to be of pure gold."

After the Reformation in Scotland, matters ecclesi-

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astical and social took many years to settle down to the smooth and noiseless current of everyday life. Reformation meant revolution ; for the people had to be weaned from old habits of creed and conduct to other and better ways of thinking and living. Such a revolution is not accomplished in a year or two ; nor even during the passing away of one generation, and the coming of another. The main factor in bringing about the changes that gradually developed themselves was the Church, with her new machinery of parish minister and kirk-session. By and by the parochial schoolmaster appeared upon the scene, and to him belongs the credit of having done much in the way of enlightening both old and young—especially the young.

The minister having been appointed to his parish, and the congregation having elected their elders, the Presbyterian government of the church began. The schoolmaster acted as session-clerk ; and the first business that came before this representative body, henceforth known as the kirk-session, was the election of the indispensable beadle. “ A man o’ wecht ” was wanted, morally and physically ; strong and active, sound in wind and limb, so as to be able to face and discharge the duties, which were no child’s play. The session-clerk of the parish of Auchterhouse records the election of their officer in the following quaint and curious terms, under date 30th January 1648: Wm. Gray of the Kirkton, by the consent of “ ye session was nominat for to be ye beadle ” ; and in the records of Cullen Parish, a year or two later, one gets an ink-

## THE BEADLE : SABBATH OBSERVANCE

ling of how the beadle was paid in these old times : —“ Yearlie ten marks of fie, and the benefit of hand-bell during his lifetime, six shillings for every marriage, and five shillings for every baptism.” Scots money, of course ; and as that was only one-twelfth the value of sterling currency, it follows that the beadle’s income was not of the fattest. In the course of time, however, a few more perquisites came his way to lighten his heart and line his pockets.

At the meetings of session long ago there was no doleful lamentation and mourning over the “lapsing of the masses”—none whatever. The masses were simply not allowed to lapse, as minister and elders took matters in their own hand, and carried out the Acts relating to church attendance on Sundays in no slipshod fashion. The “compulsory clause” was strictly enforced ; husbands were held responsible for the regular attendance of their wives and children ; masters for that of their servants and dependants ; while no stranger was allowed “within the gates” of any one unless they bound themselves to attend the “preachings.” Every absentee was hunted up ; and the beadle was kept continually on the trot serving citations to appear before the kirk-session and show just cause for absence from church on the preceding Sunday.

A public Sunday long ago was spent in Scotland something on this wise.\* The church all ready, and the doors opened, the beadle got hold of his “tow-rope” and rang the bell to announce the hour of public wor-

\* See Chapter One for description of the Scottish Sabbath a century earlier than here described.

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ship. That done, and the last "jow" of the bell dying away, he went down to the session-house, took the books to the pulpit, and returned for the minister to do the same for him. The elder at the plate handed the collection to the treasurer and set out—sometimes alone, and sometimes accompanied by a brother elder—on a tour of inspection through the village or town, for the purpose of visiting all who had not been seen entering church that morning.

Meanwhile, in the church motley groups squatted in the pewless area—some on the earthen floor and others on the little stools or "creepies" which they had brought with them from home. As the service lengthened the drowsiness strengthened, and the beadle was continually on the move for the purpose of waking sleepers, ejecting dogs, and quieting noisy children. Especially was he concerned with the women folk who gradually "hirseled yont" to be near the friendly support of post or pillar against which they rested their backs. Then they drew their plaids over their heads, and composed themselves for a comfortable nap. An old poem of the time thus alludes to this feminine failing—

But as for me,  
Sic unca sights I never see,  
For soon as oot the text I read,  
I draw my rogullay roond my heid,  
An' fast asleep I soon fa' ower—  
It's better than thro' the kirk to glower.

Better indeed: but the beadle was down upon the drowsy ones like the Assyrian, and a general awakening in the church frequently took place. These muffled

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sleepers seem to have been the source of much uneasiness and irritation to kirk-sessions generally, for severe measures were resorted to for the purpose of curing or preventing the practice. Thus on the 17th September 1643 the kirk-session of Monifieth provided their officer, Robert Scott, with "ane pynt of tar to put upon the women that held plaids about their heads."

In his search after the absentees the elder saw much to remind him that the memories of the old Catholic times had not yet died out—times when the length of Sunday was only the length of the service in church or chapel. Fishermen going to sea, farmers loading grain, millers grinding corn, women gathering dulse, lads playing golf, boys pitching stones—all in their several seasons and respective localities. Each and all were confronted by the elder, who denounced the sin of Sabbath-breaking, and reminded the breaker that for a repetition of the offence he would certainly have to appear before the session, and give an account of such conduct.

But such cases as these are comparatively harmless when compared with what was found going on indoors at home. In virtue of power conferred upon him by Acts of Presbytery and General Assembly, the elder entered the houses of the absentees, and there he found Sabbath-breaking in all its most objectionable forms—cursing, swearing, lying, fighting, drinking, slandering. Every case was reported to the session; and then followed a series of citations personally served by the beadle, who went about the parish with his life in his hand, and owed his safety solely to the fact that he

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was the messenger and the officer of the all-powerful kirk-session, from whose decree there was absolutely no escape. "Before the session," has now lost its meaning; but in olden times the phrase conjured up an ordeal which few cared to face twice. Repentance or regret on the part of the offender invariably told in his or her favour; but contumacy was at once proceeded against, and the party if found guilty was handed over to the beadle for punishment on the stool of repentance, or in the joughs or branks at the church door on Sunday morning.

The dreaded Sunday morning came, and the delinquent kept an appointment from which there was no escape. The stool of repentance, a substantial piece of church furniture, made of tough ash or oak, and large enough to accommodate more than one person, if necessary, was placed in front of the pulpit. Arrayed in a covering of coarse unbleached sackcloth the offender was brought in from the session-house by the beadle, and ordered to mount the stool in the face of the assembling congregation.

At the close of the service the minister addressed himself to the figure in sackcloth below the pulpit. "What is this that thou hast been guilty of?" he asks, in a tone that demands a straightforward answer. "A lee in' tongue," replies the sackcloth figure. "Ane auld offence. Weel might holy David say, 'Thou lovest all-devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue.' And just as weel might the godly James say, 'The tongue can no man tame.' But he doesna forbid us to try, and sae we will e'en see what this day's service will bring

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forth. Make thy repentance now in the presence of this congregation—in the sight of all Israel.”

Thus admonished, the unhappy slanderer made no long speech in self-defence, but went to the root of the matter at once by addressing her own unruly member. “Tongue, thou lee’d”—short, direct, and to the point. Spoken in accents of sorrow and contrition. Whereupon the presiding minister and surrounding elders declared themselves “satisfied,” and the punishment was over with the stripping off the sackcloth and the stepping down from the repentance stool.

After this dismal narration a gleam of humour will be welcome.

A late venerable Doctor in the Church, whose years considerably outnumbered “threescore and ten” ere “he was gathered to his forefathers,” had in his earlier days a rapidity of thought and expression which led him oftentimes to invert his sentences.

One day the Doctor was executing a piece of Church discipline for a crime, which according to the practice of Kirk and Dissent, with the exception perhaps of the Congregationalists, is the only one referred to by the Apostle as the “sin before all.” Drunkenness, profane swearing, swindling, and backbiting are of “private interpretation,” and to be dealt with accordingly; and after a long lecture on the evil example, etc., he concluded by advising the offender to “go in peace,” and henceforth *to live in the practice of all known sin and the omission of all known duty.* The venerable monitor then observed a titter going the round of the pews, and, mistaking the cause, gave with some degree of

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warmth a closing admonition to the onlookers, which also involved a right to left reading of another passage of Scripture, "Let him that thinketh he falleth take heed lest he stand."

A still more ludicrous example of inverted speech was perpetrated by a parish minister, who, taking as his text "Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly," solemnly announced to an astonished congregation that "Jonah was three days and three nights in the bale's whelly." Then reflecting a moment, he added, "No, no, my friends, I mean in the belly's whale."

Collecting fines, summoning parties before the session, carrying out its decrees in some of the dreadful forms alluded to, kept the beadle's time pretty fully occupied. Not an enviable time, surely. Hard and stern as he looked, and as he required to be, the beadle was only an ordinary man after all, subject to the same faults and failings as those of the people by whom he was surrounded. So much subject, indeed, that sometimes he so far forget himself as to incur the penalty of mounting the stool of repentance "in the sight of all Israel." What a spectacle that must have been to those who had come through the same ordeal! What sport for the Philistines to see the beadle on the stool!

Towards the close of last century, or at least in the early years of the present, the stern and rigid discipline of the Church began to relax its grip, and show signs of yielding to a better and more humane way of dealing with the faults and failures of men and women. As a nation cannot be made moral by Acts of Parlia-

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ment, so neither could the people of Scotland be made religious by resolutions of kirk-session. Stern and rigid as the discipline seems to have been, yet it would be unfair to leave unrecorded the fact that here and there one comes upon cases where a little kindly forbearance on the part of minister and kirk-session prevented matters being pushed to the verge of extremity. Such cases read like a sympathetic commentary on the divine humanity of the text, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Of the parties more immediately connected with the government and discipline of the church, the minister and the beadle seem to have been the first to give way under the general severity. The reason is not far to seek; for these two sometimes got a taste of the article which had been so freely administered to others. The beadle, as has been seen, had to take his place on the stool of repentance like any other offender. It was the minister's turn next. He, too, had to stand rebuked before his own congregation, and that must have been a humiliation and an ordeal of no common kind. It is on record that in 1804 the Rev. Mr. Kidston, of Stow, happened to take a more lenient view of some case of discipline than did the majority of his kirk-session. Pleading for his own way, but pleading all in vain, the minister lost temper and called his astonished elders "a Korah-like company." This the brethren so deeply resented that they called their minister to order, and eventually ruled that he must be rebuked before the congregation—"in the sight of all Israel." Rebuked the unhappy man was. There remains no full

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record of the circumstances ; but half a page is left blank in the minute-book at the place. It is believed that the clerk designedly omitted to record the facts.

The significance of this refusal, or unwillingness on the part of the session-clerk to record such an extraordinary case of discipline is worth noting. Like the proverbial straw, it showed which way the wind of popular opinion was beginning to blow. There is no doubt that the wind had lifted and shifted. It had long lain in the frozen north, but it was now veering towards the more genial south. The thaw had set in, the ice was breaking up, and the spring-time of the Church of Scotland had come. In the words of the fine old paraphrase sung in her churches every Sunday long ago—

. . . Legal worship ends,  
And gospel ages run.  
All old things now are past away,  
And a new world begun.

The session-clerk who had felt ashamed to record the case of discipline against his minister was only a type of many others who would have done the same thing in similar circumstances. He became sick of recording other cases of hard and fast discipline. What we do find him recording in his minute-book refers to cases which had been dealt with in a very different spirit from that of the old days of fines and public exposure on the "cutty stool," or in the "jougs" at the church door. Ere long the clerk had simply congregational matters to record, as the session had turned over other cases to be dealt with by the magistrate or

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sheriff. The treasurer of the church called on the heritors of the parish, and told them that henceforward the care of the poor must devolve upon them. The strong and stalwart beadle, the "man o' wecht," of the earlier dispensation, began to see that three-fourths of his occupation was gone, since he had nobody to summon "before the session." So he followed the cases elsewhere, hung about the purlieus of the Justiciary Courts, and ultimately joined the ranks of the rural police.

Out of the break-up of all these surroundings the minister rises, and stands forth as one of the most interesting characters in the whole gallery of Scottish portraiture. Getting away from the session-house, where so much of his time had been spent in hearing cases, and in sitting in judgment upon them, he sought the purer air of the upland village or the more congenial society of the county town. He visited the members of his flock in their own homes, and got to know the children whom he had never seen except at baptisms.

Thinking over his personal wants in the greatly altered state of things, the minister found that he needed in the first place a handy man to help him, not only on Sundays, but on week-days as well. A common man would scarcely do, for the minister's man must be one who could turn his hand to anything and everything—one whose work would be continuous, though by no means laborious. In country parishes this man would have to plough the glebe, to manage the horses, to drive the gig, to fodder the cows, to sell the sheep, to

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

buy the lambs. He must needs be a practical gardener, and feel himself so situated, any day and every day, that at any moment he could lay aside these employments and take up a course of something entirely different, such as a round of intimating ministerial visitations, and letting his master know of coming weddings, baptisms, funerals, ordinations, Presbytery meetings, school examinations, and fifty other matters which need no enumerating.

In towns the entertainment would be varied, of course, to suit the different phases of life there. Whether in town or country, however, the question arose whether there was any "mere man," as the Shorter Catechism puts it, able to fulfil these requirements in one person? At the first blush it might appear that no such person could be found. The ministers of the day had to overcome the difficulty, and from their experience it is evident that the apparently insurmountable obstacles in the way of getting such a person as indicated were successfully overcome, and that the new order of things called into existence a most important public servant in the character and individualism of THE MINISTER'S MAN.

For nearly a century the minister's man lived and flourished in Scotland—unique among his countrymen. There was none like him: a person *sui generis*. Whether the office was combined with that of beadle, as was almost always the case in country parishes, or whether it included, as it very often did, the offices of gravedigger, precentor, session-clerk, and parochial schoolmaster, the minister's man stood apart from his

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fellows, marked by many peculiarities, eccentricities, and singularities. As a child, the schoolmaster could not train him for the place he was to occupy. As a young man, the University could not mould him, even if it had got the opportunity. There was in the genus some subtle influence that was called into being and development under certain circumstances and under given conditions. When these circumstances and conditions were wanting or withheld, there was no minister's man—only an ordinary individual, without angularity or singularity of any kind. Ministers and schoolmasters might be turned out by the dozen; doctors and lawyers by the score; tradesmen and shopkeepers by the hundred; but a beadle, or minister's man, was a totally different story. When one of the order died, the vacancy created thereby caused a three weeks' wonder as to where and when another might be got. There is no exaggeration whatever in the following anecdote related of James Dawson, a well-known member of the profession in Greyfriars Church, Glasgow, in Dr. Dick's time, and throughout that of Dr. Dick's successor, Dr. King. One day James came upon three elders of a neighbouring church in solemn conclave at a street corner. The subject under discussion was the election of a new beadle; and, seeing James Dawson pass, they hailed him, and asked him if he could recommend any one for the vacancy. Reflecting for a moment, James shook his head and replied, "Gin it had been a bit minister or elder body ye wanted I could hae named a score or two, but whaur to get a beadle is mair than I can tell."

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Dr. M'Lean of Gorbals had a misunderstanding with the managers of the Gorbals Barony as to who should have the election of kirk-officer, or beadle, or bethral, as he was termed. This was considered of so great importance as to become the subject of a process in the Court of Session. Both bodies had appointed an official. Mutual interdicts were obtained to prevent the two nominees entering into office. Dr. M'Lean managed to avoid all breach of interdict by dispensing with the important services of both aspirants, and for a long time walked from the little vestry with the large Bible and Psalm-book under his oxtter, mounted the stairs, opened the door of the pulpit, and after service extricated himself in like manner and deposited the volumes in the vestry until required next Sabbath. When a stranger officiated, who was less bold and more nervous, the Doctor very kindly deposited the books on the book-board before the time of worship.

In the portraiture of Scottish life and character, the minister's man plays a delightful part. The type, however, is now extinct, or nearly so. His successor, the modern church-officer, has nothing to mark him off from the rest of his fellows; so, when a vacancy occurs, the difficulty does not lie in the uncertainty where to turn for a suitable successor, but in making the selection out of the tremendous number of applicants who offer themselves. Some time ago, an advertisement appeared in the Glasgow newspapers stating that an officer was wanted for one of the West End churches, and inviting applications for the situation. The duties were defined generally, and the emoluments stat-

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ed definitely. Had James Dawson lived to see the replies that came pouring in upon the unhappy deputy of the session-clerk, he would have held up his hands, like Dominie Sampson, and cried, "Prodigious!" *Over seven hundred applicants* offered themselves as peculiarly fitted for the vacancy—a fact which marks off, as clearly as anything can be marked off, that the days of the old beadle or minister's man have passed away for ever, and that his successor, the church-officer, reigns in his stead.

John Gowdie, of the parish of St. John's, was a fine specimen of the class that succeeded the beadle of the old days of discipline, and preceded the church-officer of modern times. John was neither an old man, nor yet was he a young one. Whatever his age might be, he had not, when he appears on the scene, met the woman whom he could ask to be his wife. At all events, if tradition may be believed, he had never proposed the momentous question, and consequently had been spared the pangs of refusal, if any such pangs were going.

No sooner, however, had John Gowdie become officially connected with the manse than he fell over head and ears in love with the minister's housekeeper, a clever active woman, with a strong Liddesdale accent. Like Jeems the doorkeeper she had no surname, and was always known as Katie, or the minister's Katie. The story of the courtship is soon told. It is perhaps one of the shortest extant; and it is here reproduced as a model for others who may feel the want of a formula when placed in similar circumstances. One sum-

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mer evening, after the outdoor work of the glebe was over, and John had hung the keys of the stable on their accustomed hook in the lobby near the kitchen door, he accosted the object of his recently-awakened affections, and suggested "a wee bit turn." A native of the village of St. John's, John Gowdie knew all the walks of the neighbourhood. But instead of choosing the green lanes or the riverside, he conducted Katie to the churchyard, and, pointing to a certain shaded spot, said, "Ma folk lie there, Katie. Wad ye like to lie there?"

The hint was taken. By and by Katie consented, and in due time gave the minister her "warning." Not without sincere regret did the Rev. Mr. Gentle, minister of the parish of St. John's, part with his esteemed housekeeper. She had served him long and faithfully—she had got to know his ways, and he had got to know hers. She may have been a little blunt in her observations, but she was always sincere and honest. Not only did she interest herself in all that pertained to the minister's personal welfare, but she extended it to his outward estate—cows, pigs, and poultry. The young Earl of —— and his brothers were frequent visitors at the manse of St. John's; and when the minister and his man happened to be out of the way, Katie invariably acted as guide to the party through the yard and garden. "There's a fine pig," said the Earl, pointing to a pink-nosed little fellow who was merrily disporting himself among the straw. "Ou ay," said Katie. "We ca' that yin Charlie, after your Lordship."

## CRITICISMS OF MINISTERS' WIVES

The marriage came off at last, and John Gowdie conducted his bride to a little cottage midway between the manse and the kirk. Having deprived the minister of his housekeeper, John's anxiety was to get him a wife. But as that matter had been before his Reverence for some time already, it was with much satisfaction that John learned everything was in proper trim, and that ere long the manse would be duly "furnished." Among the marriage presents was a handsome gig, with horse and harness complete, presented to the minister by the farmers of the parish. After the honeymoon the minister drove his bride out one evening to try the horse and gig, and on returning home he remarked to his man, "A first-rate turn-out, John."

"Glad to hear that, Mr. Gentle. For it's just about as difficult a job to get a guid horse as to get a guid wife: an' you an' me hae been geyan lucky wi' baith, I'm thinkin'."

But all beadles did not regard the ladies of their minister with favour. It is told of a West Country minister that he and his man John had got into an argument which became so hot that John was like to lose his temper. The minister naturally tried to throw oil on the troubled waters. "Man, John," he said, "it's a good thing we are not all of one mind. For example, had everybody been of my mind everybody would have been wanting my good wife Janet." "Very true," replied John, a little surlily, "but if everybody had been in the same mind as me naebody would hae ta'en her ava. She may mak' a guid enough minister's wife; but she would hae made a puir show aside my Jean!"

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Even more plain-spoken was the beadle of a parish minister who had married a lady of many virtues, but few physical attractions. The beadle, with the usual freedom of his class, expressed surprise, and commented upon the lady's apparent lack of beauty. "But, John," said the minister, "mere outward charm is not everything; and my wife possesses those inward beauties which, after all, are the more valuable." "Inward beauties!" retorted the beadle. "Inward beauties, say ye? Weel, if I was you, sir, I wad jist flipe her."

Some thoughts of the same kind seemed to have been running in the mind of James Dawson, when, shortly after Doctor King's marriage, he was presented to the bride. On that occasion James remarked, "A beadle's wife and a minister's wife had need to be unco canny and unco wary. For there's muckle depends on their prudence."

Another beadle was a little more cautious in his praise of his wife. He was a pious man, with an eye for beauty and a love of it; but he married plain Tina Mactaggart because she would make him an excellent wife. "I suppose Tina is a handsome lass?" said his cousin, who met him not long after the marriage, and had never seen the bride. "I ken ye've guid taste, Sandy." "Aweel," said the bridegroom cautiously, "she's the Lord's handiwork, Tammas. But I'm no' prepared to say she's His masterpiece."

But, leaving the ladies out of the question, much depended on the minister, and his man also. So thought Robert Fairgrieve, the beadle at Ancrum. Coming

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home from Jedburgh Fair one day, much earlier than usual, the minister met him on the way, and inquired the cause of his early return. "Oh, sir," said Robert, "huz that are office-bearers"—referring to the minister and himself—"had need to be ensamples to the flock."

Long before the days of Government Inspectors of Schools, and School Boards, the Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland used to appoint committees of their members to visit the parochial schools throughout the country, examine the children on the subjects they had been taught, and report thereon at some future meeting of Presbytery or Synod. The ministers got through their work pretty well, but they seldom or never let the opportunity slip of airing their own pet theories of education in the closing address to the children.

The man of the parish of Linrathen, on the occasion of one of these examinations, drove his master, and a young clerical neighbour, over to the parish school. An hour was fixed when he was to return and drive them back to the manse. Punctual at the minute agreed upon, John was back at the school, and there he waited. The young minister, who had at one time been a schoolmaster himself, got so much interested in the work that he not only unduly prolonged the examination, but committed the further indiscretion of addressing the children at great length, to the weariness of all concerned, except the speaker himself.

On coming out of the school the old minister found his man waiting at the door, and taking the first word

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said, apologetically, "I'm afraid we've kept you waiting, John."

"Waitin'," gruffly replied the man; "I thocht I could hae trusted *you* to look after him and keep the time."

"But, John, my young friend here gave rather a long address, and that detained us."

"Jist as I thocht," replied John, with a gesture of impatience and rising wrath. "He's like the young craws—mair jaw than judgment."

It was usual for ministers to invite their men to take a look through the library, and to encourage in them a taste for reading, whenever such a taste was shown. The minister of Duddingston, Mr. Thomson, better known as a landscape painter than as a preacher, endeavoured to cultivate the mind of his man. As a reward for any extra exertion, Mr. Thomson used to lend him a volume of Shakespeare, of which he grew to be exceedingly fond. This circumstance passed into a sort of proverb at the manse of Duddingston, so that on the occurrence of any good fortune, or faring better than usual in the kitchen, the man used to say, "It's no' every day we get Shakespeare to read."

Tastes differ, of course, even among ministers' men; for while one preferred Scott, another took to Shakespeare; while a third, the man of Kinross, was attracted by the botanical books in his master's library, and a bonnie mess he made of the big words he came across therein.

One morning as the minister went round the flower-garden, he found William removing a favourite rho-

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dodendron. "What's this you're about?" the minister asked in astonishment. "Weel, sir, ye maun understand that this rotten denthorn disna corroborate wi' the rest o' the shrubbery, an' sae I'm e'en translating it owre here."

The imperfect fencing of the manse garden seems to have been the frequent source of irritation and annoyance between the minister and his neighbours long ago. The surroundings of St. John's were apparently no exception to this unsatisfactory state of matters, for Mr. Gentle's patience was sorely tried by the unwelcome incursions both of feathered and human bipeds. A new paling or fence was arranged for; and when it came to be set up, "John," said the master to the man, "keep it high and strong, for my Christianity cannot stand the test of our neighbours' poultry and our neighbours' boys coming into the garden uninvited."

"Naeless can mine, Mr. Gentle. I ha'e noticed this—that there's an end to a' peace, gudewill, an' practical religion, when there's no' a gude fence round a garden."

There is another story told of a minister, and the insufficiently protected state of the manse garden. After much correspondence on the subject, a deputation of heritors examined the fencing, and then repaired to the manse to explain that they were anxious to put the garden all right, and place it in a thoroughly protected state.

"That's exactly what we want," replied the minister.

"Well, then," said one of the deputation, "suppose we put up a strong stout fence of stabs and railing?"

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*"Stabs and railing!"* cried the minister. "My man and I have had nothing else since we came among ye."

Sometimes the minister's man prided himself on his skill in guiding the plough. One of the order, rejoicing in the perfervid Scottish name of William Wallace, had, in his youthful days, frequently obtained at the annual district ploughing matches the premium awarded to the first ploughman. Forgetful of his man's reputation, the minister on one occasion ventured to criticise a portion of the work done. "Weel, minister," replied William, "if ye could preach as weel as I can plough ye'd tak' the first prize in Nithsdale."

The next man does not come so well out of the minister's criticism as William Wallace did; nevertheless one may admire the way in which he tried to set himself right. "Your drills arena stracht at a'," said the minister to his new man. "They're very unlike the kind o' wark Tammas used to turn out."

"Hout, tout," replied the new man, "Tammas didna ken how to manage drills. Ye see, sir, when they're cruikit like mine the sun gets in on baith sides, an' that the tatties ken fu' brawly."

No kind of farm work seemed to come amiss to the country minister's man. If he had no practical experience of one kind of it, he made up for that by calling into requisition the common sense that was in him, and which always made him great. Anxious to have a certain part of the glebe trenched, the minister of Strathspey sent his man to examine the ground and bring back an idea of what the probable cost would be. Totally unacquainted with the use of the chain

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in land surveying or measuring, the man paced the ground, calculated the cost after his own fashion, and reported the case to his master in the following quaint and original formula: "There's about three roods, an'a half mair; an' as for the expense, that'll jist break the back o' sax pund." It afterwards turned out that the man was correct, both in his measurement and statement of cost.

The following incident has reference to the crops on the glebe, and the man's anxiety to put a late harvest in the best possible light in the eyes of a stranger. A minister on a moorland parish received a visit from an English friend so late in the season as the month of December. From an unkindly season operating on an ungenial soil, it so happened that the little crop of the glebe was only then being cut by John Fairweather, the minister's man. In spite of sundry artifices on the man's part to have the English visitor's attention taken off the nakedness of the land and the harvest in winter, the latter one day came where John was busy cutting the grain. Expressing his surprise at the lateness of the harvest, he was still more surprised on being told that the crop then being gathered was the second within that year. When John Fairweather was afterwards reproved by the minister for practising a manifest deceit in the eyes of the English visitor, John replied, "Dear sir, what I told the Englishman was as true as the gospel. Ye ken yersel' that the last crop wasna ta'en aff the grund till Januar' o' this blessed year!"

In the winter season the minister's man had his

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attention principally taken up with indoor work, in so far as the glebe was concerned. Mr. Gillies, of St. Monance, Fife, had occasion to speak to Peter Drummond, his man, on the subject of stopping work at sunset, while many of the neighbours were thrashing grain and doing other work by candle-light. "Weel, sir," replied Peter, "gin yewant the corn flailed by caunle-licht I'll do yer wull."

Next day at noon Mr. Gillies was passing the barn, and hearing the sound of Peter's flail he stepped in, and was surprised to see a candle burning on the top of an upturned bushel.

"Why this folly and waste?" demanded the minister angrily, as he pointed to the burning candle.

"Dinna ye mind, sir," replied Peter, "that ye wanted the corn thrashed by caunle-licht?"

"Come, come, Peter, you shall have no more candles. Put that out at once, and stop this waste."

Some time after this incident Peter was requested to get the horse ready, as Mr. Gillies was to go to a distant part of the parish to visit a sick parishioner. It was evening when Peter got the order, and after a considerable delay he at last appeared at the front door with *the cow* saddled and bridled.

"I wis' I haena made some strange mistake, Mr. Gillies. But syne I've got nae caunle it's no' muckle wonder if I've put the saddle on the wrong beast."

Fairly overcome by Peter's eccentricity and drollery, the minister withdrew the order as to candles, and left Peter to the freedom of his own will and his own way in the matter.

## THE MINISTER'S MAN & THE GLEBE

In some country parishes where the glebe happened to be in grass instead of arable land, the minister's man was more of the old family servant or coachman style than farm worker. A remarkable instance of this kind or type is found in the case of Andrew Leggat, attached to the manse of Wilton near Hawick, in the time of Dr. Charters. With a mind of his own, somewhat slow in all his movements, and not to be dictated to, Andrew fancied that by going on horseback to Hawick he would be more expeditious than by going on foot. He accordingly thought it necessary to set off to the extremity of the glebe, nearly a mile away, for the purpose of catching one of the carriage horses, and riding back to Hawick. The consequence was that one of the maid-servants frequently went to the town herself, and was back again, before Andrew was equipped for the journey.

Numerous and frequent were the complaints made by the servants of Andrew's disobliging ways, but the verdict of Dr. Charters in all such cases was the same. "As long as I have a house Andrew shall have a chair."

Another peculiarity of this man was the singular one of his not being a member of the church of which his master was minister, but an Antiburgher of the most rigid type. He utterly refused to enter any parish church. On occasions when Dr. Charters had to preach elsewhere than at Wilton, Andrew would drive him to the place of appointment, and take a nap in the carriage till the service was over.

The following incident occurred on the Saturday of a Communion season when Dr. Charters had ar-

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

ranged to conduct the service at Ashkirk: The carriage came round to the front door, and the maid-servant having put the minister's greatcoat into the vehicle slammed the carriage door. The coachman, thinking that the minister himself was inside, drove off, and did not discover the mistake till he arrived at Ashkirk and found no minister there. The Doctor, apprised of the circumstances, had to borrow a horse, and ride as fast as possible after the runaway wheels. He arrived just when the coachman was in a quandary wondering what had become of him ; and all the remark he made was, " Andrew, you've got before me."

Mutual forbearance was, no doubt, at the bottom of the long service that used to exist between minister and man. It is related of Mr. Mair, the first minister of the Secession Church at West Linton, that though a man of sterling worth he was, at the same time, afflicted with an infirmity of temper which he could neither control nor stifle. His beadle was so frequently exposed to these ebullitions of temper that he at length could stand them no longer, and gave the minister notice that he wanted to leave his service.

"Hoots, man," said Mr. Mair, " I'm sure ye ken that my temper's nae sooner on than it's off again."

"That may be true," was the reply, " but the confoondit thing is, it's nae suner off than it's on again."







THE ELDER  
By H. C. Preston Macgoun, R.S.W.



CHAPTER EIGHT  
THE MAN'S MINISTER



## CHAP. EIGHT : THE MAN'S MINISTER

JOHN GOWDIE'S MINISTER, THE REVEREND Mr. Gentle of St. John's, enjoyed the reputation of being a better farmer than preacher. Had he lived in the days of agricultural shows he would inevitably have been chosen as one of the judges of Cheviot sheep and draught horses. He was accounted an excellent and reliable authority on these two special departments of farm stock. He used to attend all the local fairs and markets—not so much because he had anything to buy or sell, but because he greatly enjoyed the company of farmers, dealers, shepherds, and others who had the atmosphere of the farm or the breeze of the hills about them. Not seldom was Mr. Gentle's opinion asked in cases of disputed values, and many are the instances in which his judgment was accepted as final. One of these instances occurred at St. Boswell's Fair where, at a tent door on a miserably wet and disagreeable day, two men were standing haggling over the price of a melancholy pony. The seller stood out for seven pounds, but the prospective buyer could not see his way to offer so much. Seeing Mr. Gentle passing, both parties hailed him, and asked the favour of his opinion as to the price of the "gallo-way." Looking at the dejected creature the minister replied, "A pound a leg is about top price for him"—a price which was eventually offered and accepted.

Another minister who had a great reputation as a judge of live stock was the late Dr. John Gillespie of Mouswald.

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

"Did ye iver hear the Doctor preach?" asked one of his farmer admirers of another.

"No, never. Did you?"

"Ay, man. An' as sune as he gaed into the pulpit, and pit his fingers on the Bible, ye could see he kent fine how tae haundle a beast."

Personally Mr. Gentle was much esteemed and respected in his parish. Good-natured and cheerful, he seemed always in the mood for picking up anecdotes, stories, and incidents, and as he was gifted with the dramatic art of relating or re-telling them his company was always welcome at dinner-parties and social gatherings. Before being settled in St. John's, Mr. Gentle began life as a clergyman in a lonely parish stretching up the northern slope of the Cheviot Hills, famous for their sheep, their shepherds, and their collies. While there the following incident occurred one Sunday :—

Unconsciously Mr. Gentle, while in the pulpit, had allowed the close of his sentences to terminate in a sort of ascending whine or yelp. Of this bad habit he was cured by a shepherd's dog in the incident referred to. A young collie in the church, lying at his beloved master's feet, became so excited under the high and ascending notes of the preacher that he began to yelp loudly, as if in sympathy. Disturbed by the action of the collie, Mr. Gentle stopped and, pointing in the direction of the interruption, called out in an angry tone, "Put out that disturbing dog there." The shepherd, angry in his turn at having his faithful collie thus publicly censured and disgraced, rose

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and dragged the animal along the passage. Unable, however, to leave the church without speaking a word in favour of his canine companion, he stopped, faced the minister, and called out in an injured tone, "'Twas yoursel' begood it !"

This incident cured Mr. Gentle of his whine in the pulpit; but after his subsequent settlement in St. John's his pulpit utterances developed into a sentimental monotone, which was remarkable in a man whose speech on week-days was of the blithest and cheeriest sort. But certain as Sunday came round, Mr. Gentle's countenance assumed a grave and far-away look, his sermons were delivered in monotone, and the subject of his narrative or exhortation was almost always of the most solemn and awe-inspiring character. Thus his masterpiece, his greatest effort, was a discourse known as "The Great Majority," founded on the text in the seventh chapter of Revelation. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands."

In the days of our forefathers it was the case in some parishes that when the church bell began to ring, it was not so much to announce that the hour of public worship had come as to intimate the appearance of the great man or laird, of the locality. Time was taken from the laird, when he was seen at a certain point on his way to church. In the *Heart of Midlothian* we have an illustration of this custom on that day when the Rev. Reuben Butler was ordained as minister of the

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

parish of Knocktarlitie. Expecting every moment to hear the bell ring for the ordination service, Archibald Campbell expresses his astonishment that there was yet no sound of it, although the hour had come.

"Fat ta deil, Mr. Archibald," answered the Captain of Knockdunder, "wad ye hae them ring the bell before I am ready to gang to kirk? I wad gar the bedral eat the bell-rope if he took ony sic freedom. But if ye want to hear the bell, *I will just show mysel' on the knowe-head, and it will begin jowing forthwith.*"

From a newspaper cutting we get an incident of much the same import, showing that the laird's time is still the kirk's time in some parts of the country even at the present day. A young minister, getting a little nervous one Sunday, remarked to the church-officer, "George, it is surely time to go and ring the church bell, is it not?" "Na, na, sir," replied George; "I never ring the bell till I see the laird's carriage comin' owre the hillyonder. But," producing his mull, "tak' a snuff, sir; dinna befeared. Dinna distress yoursel', an' ye'll do fine."

It is curious how many and varied are the associations that cluster round the sound of a kirk bell on Sunday mornings. To some it suggests one set of ideas; to others, it suggests another entirely different. The stillness of the Sabbath morn *without* the sound of its church bells used to put the emigrants of last generation in mind of their native land, and made them sing the song of the broken hearted—

Oh, why left I my hame?

Why did I cross the deep?

## THE VESTRY AND ITS PRIVILEGE

Great and important as was John Gowdie in farming matters, he was greater and of more importance still in church affairs. Clad in black cloth and white tie on Sundays, with serious face and solemn gait, he looked the picture of a minister's man of a former generation.

On Sunday mornings the session-house or vestry was the *sanctum sanctorum* of the church. Inside none might presume to enter before public worship but the minister and his man. John Gowdie did everything in his power to prevent intrusion. "No' the now," he used to say to any one seeking to enter the vestry without some very special business on hand. "No' the now ; wait till after worship, an' then ye can stay as lang's he likes to keep ye."

Numerous interesting stories come to us about John's professional brethren, with reference to the secrets of the vestry.

Many years ago, when the beard and moustache were not the common appendages they are now to both clergy and laity, an unshaven minister went to preach for Dr. Stevenson, of Coupar-Angus. After ringing the bell the man went round to the vestry, and found the preacher standing with gown and bands on, all ready for work.

"Is it time?" quietly asked the minister, without being conscious of any shortcoming or dereliction.

"No!" sharply answered the man, with a meaning look.

Dr. Stevenson's son, Patrick, came in at the time,

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

and inquired the cause of the delay in taking the minister in.

"Come what may, Pat," the man replied, "*that hairy wratch*'ll get leave to steek the poopit door himsel' for me the day."

Beards and moustaches were then unusual, even among laymen; while among the clergy, and especially parish ministers, they were practically unknown. Dr. Davidson, writing on this subject, says, "No beard fell over the neckcloth. Clean chin and lip, and the minimum of whiskers were *de rigueur* in those days. A bearded student appearing for licence before the Presbytery of Brechin was told by Doctor Smith of Montrose to go home and shave; and a story used to be told of an old Morayshire minister who paused in a speech he was making in the Presbytery, and interjected, 'Moderator, my thoughts have been disturbed in pursuing the line of observation I intended, by looking at that thing upon Tam Steven's chin,' Tam being a young colleague, a laird's son, who sported the chin-tuft called an 'imperial.'"

But to return to the minister's man.

A parish minister heard the following news with perfect equanimity: "Eh, sir," said the man while assisting him on with the gown, "d'ye see what a lot o' folk are gaun owre the hill the day to the meetin'-house?"

"Very true, John," replied the minister; "but ye dinna see ony o' the stipen' gaun owre after them."

What attractions were at the "meeting-house"

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that morning can only be surmised, but that some counter-attraction was got up to win not only the kirk folk back but the Seceders as well, is evident from the following incident. The man was getting the minister ready for the pulpit when the former observed, " I hope, sir, you'll do your very best the day, for there's a gey wheen U.P.'s in the kirk this mornin'."

Such observations as these were generally made in the lobby while the congregation passed in to worship. The man loved much to have a chat for a few minutes with the elder at the plate; and as he stood there he kept his eye and his ear open to all that was going on. There was nothing of any moment that escaped his observation. A stranger he could tell at once, and he was always ready to pay attention to that stranger if there was any occasion for doing so. An amusing story is told in this connection of Andrew Clark, the beadle to Dr. Robertson of Irvine.

One Sunday morning, Colonel Ferguson of She-walton arrived at the church and made his way down one of the passages as if wishing to take a seat pretty well forward, and near the pulpit. While still in the passage, the Colonel, an elderly gentleman and lame of one leg, was overtaken by Andrew, who asked in a sort of stage whisper, " Are ye deaf?" " No, thank God," replied the Colonel; " I'm not deaf. I have all my senses." " Weel, weel," said Andrew quite coolly, " if ye're no deaf, I'll gie ye a back seat."

The old beadle of St. John's, Glasgow, used to leave his minister in the vestry for a little, go round to the

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front door, and after seeing that all was in order, he remarked to the elder at the plate, "Ay, a's richt; I maun away round an' put him up."

The reports brought round by the beadle on such occasions affected different ways. A country clergyman was so much put out of tune one Sunday morning by something his man had said that he flew into a violent passion, and was about to utter things unadvisedly with his lips, when a little timely reflection came and restrained his tongue. Noticing, however, that he remained under great mental excitement, his man sympathetically asked, "Wad an aith relieve ye, sir?"

It is remarkable in what a variety of ways history repeats itself, for we have an instance of this repetition in Dr. King's experience when he, too, was under great excitement on account of the non-arrival of an expected minister. Observing his master's increasing alarm, James Dawson, his man, boldly but sympathetically hazarded the suggestion, "If a bit aith would ease ye, Doctor, dinna mind me."

Few people who go to church and see the pulpit regularly occupied when the hour of public worship arrives have any idea of the terrible strain and suspense that are created when the expected preacher fails to turn up. It is all very well when the resident clergyman is in the vestry, for in an emergency he can solve the difficulty by occupying the pulpit himself. But when he is absent, or "exchanging pulpits," it is no light matter when the other minister fails to make his appearance. In such circumstances the anxiety

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communicates itself to the congregation, who begin to fear that "something has happened." The bell has ceased; the last of the late comers is seated; the cough is warned off; the most awful silence prevails. All eyes are turned in the direction of the vestry door, as the beadle is expected every moment. He does not appear. The situation becomes insupportable.

Such a scene once occurred at Mauchline many years ago. After a dreadful suspense of fifteen minutes, the beadle entered the church, made his way slowly along the accustomed passage, and mounted the pulpit stair. When half-way up, he stopped, turned his face to the congregation and thus addressed them: "There was ane Wudra to hae preached here the day, but he's neither come hissel', nor has he sent the scrape o' a pen to say what's come owre him. Ye'd better keep your seats for anither ten meenits to see whether the body turns up or no'. If he disna come, there's naething for't but for ye a' to gang hame again an' say naething mair aboot it. The like o' this hasna happened here syne I hae been conneckit wi' Mauchline, an' that's mair than four-and-thirty year now."

For neither duke nor earl, laird nor heritor, did John Gowdie wait on Sunday mornings. As the last "jow" of the bell died away—and that was punctually at half-past eleven o'clock—he was seen to emerge from the vestry, reverently bearing the big Bible and Psalm-book in his hands. Slowly and solemnly he mounted the pulpit stair, deposited the books on the pulpit cushion, and then descended to wait at the foot for his master, the minister.

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With his round and ruddy face, on which was a far-away look, Mr. Gentle entered the church, mounted to the pulpit, followed by John, who "steeked him in," and then returned to the vestry to wait for the coming round of the elders with the collection. When the money was counted and carefully locked past in the press, the officials left the vestry and joined their fellow-worshippers in the church.

So dependent upon each other were minister and man, while the former was in the pulpit, that they never, somehow, lost touch. There was often occasion for communicating with each other regarding emergencies that might arise at any moment. One Sunday afternoon, while Dr. Lindsay Alexander was preaching in the Queen Street Hall, Edinburgh, he felt the atmosphere to be unusually oppressive and uncomfortable. Signing to his man, Sloan, the Doctor whispered during the singing of the hymn before the sermon, "The atmosphere is intolerable; it makes me quite ill. Something must be done." Sloan listened; then with a half-pitying, half-comical look, he replied, "Ye'll be waur afore you're better. I can do naething. *The ventilators are a' nailed doon.*" This was appalling information; but the Doctor accepted the inevitable, and managed to continue the service without any breakdown.

Dr. King, of the Greyfriars, Glasgow, was also once sorely beset with a difficulty which he had to face and contend against all the while he occupied the pulpit one Saturday afternoon preparatory to the Communion next day. Owing to the non-arrival of an

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expected minister, Dr. King had to take the service himself. Unprepared for doing so, he made use of a written discourse which he fortunately had with him. The handwriting being small, and the afternoon turning very dark, the Doctor was gladdened by the sight of James Dawson slowly mounting the pulpit stair with the intention, no doubt, of giving more light. Instead, however, of turning up the gas, James deliberately turned it down, and then descended the pulpit stair. With measured tread he next ascended the stair on the other side, and began to lower the corresponding light. Difficult as Dr. King had found the reading of his MS. to be before, he found it still more so under the lowered light.

"Put up the gas," he whispered to James. "It'll break the globes!" replied the man. "No matter; put up the gas." "It'll break the globes, I tell ye." And James was returning as deliberately as he had come, when Dr. King raised his voice and repeated his command in a tone which could not be disobeyed. Reluctantly James screwed up the burners, but protested aloud, "Weel, ye'll see it'll break the globes."

The practice of sleeping has been, and still is, one of the standing grievances of the preacher. The grievance is perpetuated from generation to generation, since the days of Eutychus to this day, because the preacher forgets that he himself has something to do with the cause which produced the effect. The taking of snuff by men, the carrying of highly-scented flowers by women, and the sucking of strong peppermint drops or ginger lozenges by children—and old chil-

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dren, too—were all probably called into requisition for the purpose, or the sake of counteracting the drowsiness begotten of long walks to church, badly ventilated buildings, drowsy sermons, and protracted services. The sign of a snuff-mull in church sometimes irritated the preacher to such a degree that he regarded it as a personal affront and anything but a compliment. Many were the occasions, in the experience of former generations, on which the preacher spoke out what was in his thoughts; and the beadle himself sometimes came in for a share of any rebuke that was going. In relating his professional reminiscences, a minister's man tells that, in the middle of a sermon one day, a neighbour asked a snuff, when "I handed him ma mull—thinkin' nae wrang. But the minister saw us, an', says he, 'Some o' ye doon there are mair concerned about your noses than your souls.'"

Other ministers, however, looked upon the great institution of snuff-taking in church in quite a different light, as a bit of real enjoyment in which they themselves would gladly participate were they out of the pulpit. That some did participate in the pleasure of the mull is evident from the story of the beadle who hit upon a most ingenious expedient for procuring a supply when the minister's ran short during a long-continued snowstorm in the Highlands. "What's to be done, John?" was the minister's piteous inquiry; "what's to be done, man?" John shook his head, implying that he could not tell, but the shaking set free an idea, and away he went to carry it into practice.

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In a little while he returned to the manse, and in gleeful tones told his master that he had managed to get "a wee pickle." "Where did you get it, John? Where did you get it, man?" "*I soopit the poopit,*" was the expressive reply.

When a personal friend or ruling elder did not find his way round to the vestry after service to have a chat, the minister could always rely on the beadle; and the main subject of conversation between these two worthies was the sermon which had just been delivered. "I hae often heard ye blamed for gi'en us auld sermons," said a beadle one day in the vestry, "but I'll defy man, woman, or bairn to say that the discourse this afternoon was an auld ane. Because it's exactly a fortnight this day syne ye handselled it for the first time." This was so delicately put that there lives norecord of the minister's reply. "James," said a minister to his man, as the latter came into the vestry, "I see by your face you've been tackling somebody. What has amused ye?"

"Oh, naething particular," replied James, still inwardly chuckling, however; "I was only thinkin' on a bit incident that happened as the kirk was skailin'."

"And what was it, James?"

"Weel, sir, as it's no worth bein' angry about I may let it out. Ye're blamed for preachin' an auld sermon now an' again, but I rather think I got the better o' some o' the compleeners the day."

"How so, James?" inquired the minister, becoming more interested at every inquiry.

"Weel, juist in this way. As sune as the last psalm

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was finished, ye see, I went out as usual an' opened the west door, an' then ran round to open the east. Just as I was comin' back, wha should I meet but Newmains an' some other farmers laughin' an' nudgin' ane anither. Fine I kenned what they wanted to say, but I took the first word, an' says I, 'Weel, Newmains, ye canna say that *that's* an auld ane ye got the day, for it's nae mair than six weeks syne ye got it afore.' Sae I got the better o' them ; an' that's what set me a-laughin'."

The transition from sermons old to sermons long is simple and easy. While spending a holiday at Glenisla, Professor Flint preached at Lintrathen for the parish minister. The sermon was one of the Professor's best, and during its delivery he continued for more than an hour, speaking with tremendous energy. Unaccustomed to witness such physical display in the pulpit, the beadle was simply dumbfounded. In the vestry next Sunday the minister asked how the Professor got on. "Got on!" exclaimed John. "It's a wonder he ever got off again ; for he walloped, an' he walloped, an' whiles turned up his een just for a' the worl' like a deen' cauf. Od's sake, I was fleyed for him."

These and such-like criticisms of the pulpit were always a great delight to Mr. Gentle on Sundays after service. And no one was better at giving them, or relating the quaint and humorous circumstances attending them, than John Gowdie. One Sunday a neighbouring clergyman was "exchanging" with Mr. Gentle, and while the former was about half-way through his sermon an auld wife sitting behind the beadle

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tapped him on the shoulder and anxiously inquired, "Where's his grund?" "Wumman!" cried John, turning round, "he has nae grund, *he's soomin'!*" Could anything better describe a floundering preacher than such homely criticism?

The late Rev. Dr. Andrew Thomson was fond of relating the following sermon story. A clergyman one day inquired of his beadle how he had liked the stranger preacher who had occupied the pulpit on the previous Sunday. "He did no' that bad," replied Saunders; "but as for the sermon, it was owre plain an' simple for me. I like they kind best that jum'le the judgment an' confound the sense. Od, sir," continued the man, "I never listened to ane that could come up to yoursel' *in that respec'.*"

A member of Greyfriars, who had been absent from church on the preceding Sunday, asked James Dawson how the preacher had got on. With a shrug of the shoulders James replied, "It was guid, rough, coorse, country wark"—four adjectives which described exactly the style of an uncouth, though very able, country minister.

It may be appropriate here to state what the beadle and his professional brethren thought of their masters. "I think our minister does very weel," observed one man to another. "It's gran' to see how he gars the stour flee out o' the pulpit cushion." To which the other replied—not to be outdone—"Stour out o' the pu'pit cushion! Man, our minister sin' he cam' amang's has banged the puir Bible till it's a' fluffers an' lowse leaves."

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It is not only sermon-criticising, however, that arises out of the incidents connected with the exchanges of pulpits. They bring out many points of interest in the beadle, and showed what an all-round sort of man he was. After the lapse of several years, a certain minister officiated in an Edinburgh church. Being near-sighted, he asked the beadle to have the Bible placed rather higher on the cushion than usual, and expressed the hope, before going up to the pulpit, that this point had been attended to. "The Bible's just the same height as when ye were here afore, sir," said the man ; adding, as he surveyed the preacher from head to foot, and noticed that he was much stouter than on his previous visit, "I canna say that ye've grown muckle frae north to south sin' then ; but ye hae made a guid bit frae east to west, at onyrate."

Vacancies now and again occurred in the churches: on these occasions the beadle rose to the full height of official consequence and responsibility. Probationers, licentiates, candidates—excepting always, of course, those cases where there was a presentee to the parish—were all taken in hand by the beadle, and conducted through the usual formalities. Some of the young preachers pleased him, while some offended him. To the latter he could be so "snell and distant" as to prevent them taking any liberties with him. To the former he could make things pleasant all round if they placed themselves under his guidance, and tried on no airs. Neither metaphorically nor figuratively, but literally, did the beadle often clap the young preacher on the back, and give him every kind of encour-

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agement. To the timid he would say, "Gang your ways up the pu'pit stair, an' ye'll sune get owre your nervishness. When I first took up the books, I was geyan shaky like you ; but I sune got owre that, an' there's naething pits me about noo. Come away after me, sir, an' I'll steek ye in."

When the timid preacher returned to the vestry after service he was certain to receive a few more words of encouragement, provided he had acted up to the "coaching wrinkles" supplied by the beadle. It was a touching sight to see the deep interest which Andrew Clark of Irvine always took in the welfare and get-up of a young preacher, who was a frequent visitor at Dr. Robertson's. One Sunday morning when all was ready in the vestry, and the preacher was just about to set out for the pulpit, Andrew called out, "Come back, James. Come back, I tell ye." Thus detained, "James" asked what was wrong. "Brush your hair," Andrew continued ; "ye maunna gang up to the pu'pit that way." After a bit touching up, the young preacher was allowed to go—not, however, without this warm commendation, "Noo you'll do. I couldna see ye gaun up wi' your hair in sic a state."

Here the beadle became a little too familiar, perhaps, in calling the young preacher by his Christian name. That, however, was a common occurrence in the profession, and there was no familiarity intended. It is related of Dr. A. K. H. Boyd that after he had been minister of Irongray for some years, and a Doctor of Divinity, he went to Glasgow to preach for his father. The old beadle, who had known the divine from in-

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fancy, being asked by one of the elders who the preacher was, replied, "Oo, that's jist oor Awnery"—meaning Andrew Boyd, and associating himself with the preacher. In the same spirit of familiarity the beadle of the parish church, St. Andrews, called the Principal's distinguished son, afterwards Dr. Tulloch of Glasgow, "Willie," and Professor Stewart of Aberdeen "Little Stewart."

Young ministers, however, did not always receive the attention which "James" got at Irvine. One beadle had a young relative who, much against the beadle's advice, had taken to the ministry, and was about to make his first appearance in the pulpit. Feeling the estrangement, the young preacher proceeded with unskilful hands to put on the gown without the beadle's assistance.

"What are ye gaun to do wi' that?" he was asked. "Oh, this is the day I was asked to preach here." "Ay, d'ye say sae? Wha asked ye?" "The minister, of course." "Weel, I'm glad I hae naething to do wi't. Wha's gaun to listen to ye?" "You, for one, James, seeing we are kith and kin." "Nā, na," replied James, shaking his head. "But I'll tell ye what I'll do. I'll tak' up the Bible, an' steek ye in. Ye can mak' a fule o' yoursel' brawly without me listenin' to ye."

At the close of an afternoon service a young preacher, who had gone to give a certain congregation an opportunity of hearing him as a candidate for the vacancy, returned to the vestry and divested himself of his canonicals. Anxious to see more of what might probably be the scene of his future labour, the pre-

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cher returned to the church and found the beadle busy "sorting up." "I'm just taking a look at the church," observed the candidate in a casual sort of way.

"Ay, take a guid look at it, for it's no' likely ye'll ever see't again."

Not much encouragement there! Perhaps of all beadles who excelled in the art of "taking down" the pretensions of a preacher, young or old, James Dawson, of the Greyfriars, was that beadle. To a young preacher anxious to know if he had been well heard in the forenoon service, James replied, "'Deed, my frien', gin your afternoon discourse be nae better than your forenoon, it'll matter little whether you're heard or no'." And to another forenoon preacher James took up the intimations with this remark to the delighted recipient, "It may be as weel to read them noo, as there'll no likely be mony folk here in the afternoon."

The day of ordination or induction to a new charge, or the "removal to another corner of the vineyard," as an old minister expressed it, was always a time of much importance to the beadle who had lost one master and was anxiously looking forward to the settlement of another. When the Rev. Wm. Brown was ordained to the parish of St. Bernard's, Edinburgh, in 1841, James Whitecross, the beadle, went forward to shake hands with him as the rest of the congregation had done. "It's a great change this, sir," observed James, with much solemnity of manner. Not understanding the import which seemed to lie within the observation, the new minister inquired its meaning. "Ou, ye see, sir, a' the other ministers o' this kirk were

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Jeemses, an' I'm a Jeems mysel'. It's, as I was sayin', a greatchange; but when ane comes to think o't, this worl' is fu' o' change, an' I havena the sma'est doubt but what ye'll get on, e'en though ye're no' a Jeems."

"Thank you, Jeems. There's much in a name, but not everything," replied the minister, amused at his man's reflections, and pleased to think that there was every likelihood of his getting on in St. Bernard's Parish, notwithstanding the breaking of the record in the matter of Christian names.

After Dr. Robertson's removal from the village of Mains to the charge of the High Church, or Cathedral, of Glasgow, Walter Nicol was invited to see his old master and spend a day or two with him. The invitation was accepted, and the visit to Glasgow was a memorable event in Walter's life, and the subject of much conversation after the return to his native village.

Taking his visitor to the Cathedral, Dr. Robertson pointed out its noble columns, its lofty arches, and its beautiful windows. "This is a much finer and grander church than the one at Mains, Walter, is it not?"

"I'm no' sae sure o' that," replied the country beadle.

"What!" exclaimed Dr. Robertson. "Surely you have no fault to find with this grand old Cathedral?"

"Nae great fau't, Doctor. But she's useless big—she's got nae laft, an' she's sair fashed wi' thae muckle pillars about her."

Could criticism be more delightful in its homeliness, or truer to human nature in the old man's anxiety to "uphaud his ain kirk" against even the Cathedral of Glasgow!

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In his *Reminiscences of Fifty Years*, Mr. Mark Boyd relates that his brother-in-law, Captain Robinson, during a survey of the West Coast of Scotland, received a visit from the Grand Duke Constantine of Russia. Anxious to show the Duke all the objects of interest in the neighbourhood, Captain Robinson steamed forward to Iona one Sunday morning, in the belief that that day would be the most suitable on which to show the stranger the many objects of ecclesiastical interest in the neighbourhood.

Landing on the Island, Captain Robinson sought out the old beadle in charge, and requested the favour of being shown round the ruins of the venerable church. But the old man refused the request. "Do you know whom I have brought to see Iona?" asked the Captain.

"Yes, he's the Emperor o' a' the Russians, as I see by the flag on his ship yonder. But if he was the Queen hersel' I wadna gie up the keys on the Lord's Day."

"Would you take a glass of whisky on the Lord's Day."

"That's a totally different thing," replied the beadle—"a totally different thing entirely."

After a wet morning, some tourists visited the ruins of Dryburgh Abbey. On passing an old baptismal font, one of the party, observing that it contained a little water, asked the old man in attendance, "Is this *holy* water?"

"Ou ay, it's holy water, I can assure ye; for it cam' straught doon frae Heaven no' half an hour syne."

Dryburgh reminds one of Melrose, where lived at

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the close of the last and beginning of the present century one of the best known of all the old Scottish beadles. This was John Bower, minister's man, beadle, and sexton of the parish of Melrose, honoured with the friendship of Sir Walter Scott, and immortalised in the writing of Washington Irving.

During a tour in Scotland Irving called at Abbotsford one morning, and sent in his card, on which he had written that he was on his way to Melrose, and desired to know if it would be agreeable to Mr. Scott to receive him later in the day. The great novelist was at breakfast when the card was handed in, and on receiving it he instantly sallied out, followed by children and dogs, to greet the distinguished visitor and welcome him to Abbotsford. "You're just in time for breakfast, and afterwards ye shall see all the wonders of the Abbey."

Engaged on *Rob Roy* at the time, Scott was unable to accompany his guest personally; but he put him under the charge of Charles, his second son, a bright little fellow of eleven or twelve. On arriving at Melrose, Irving and his youthful guide were received by John Bower with the utmost cordiality. "The old man," says the genial American, "was one of the most authentic and particular of cicerones; he pointed out everything in the Abbey that had been described by Scott in his 'Lay of the Last Minstrel,' and would repeat with broad Scottish accent the passages which celebrated it."

The fictions of Scott had become facts with John Bower. From constantly living beside the ruins of

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Melrose Abbey, and pointing out the scenes of the poem, the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" had, in a manner, become interwoven with his whole existence. He could not bear that any other production of the poet should be preferred to that wondrous Border romance. "Faith," said Bower to Washington Irving, "it's just e'en as gude a thing as Mr. Scott has written; an' if he were staunin' there I'd tell him so—an' then he'd lauch."

In many country districts the kirk beadle was also the parish gravedigger or sexton. It was felt to be a matter of convenience that in one person the two offices should be combined, for the churchwork lay in the beadle's hand as he was always about the place—never very far away when he might be wanted to arrange and discharge the last earthly offices due at funerals.

Not always, however, were the two offices combined. If the combination had its advantages, it had also its disadvantages. There may have been occasions, for example, when it was a little awkward for the beadle, as gravedigger, to make inquiry regarding the health of any ailing parishioner. There might be in the inquiry an eye to future fees and professional employment; at least so thought the beadle, whose master asked him one Sunday morning if he had called to ask for the health of a lady who had been poorly for some time and unable to attend church.

"Na, na," John replied, with some asperity; "d'ye think I'm a fule? Ill would it become *me* to ca' an' ask about the health o' onybody that's off their ordinar'."

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John was right. His visit might have savoured of suggestiveness, and it was better to leave the matter of visitation to the minister himself.

When the office of parish gravedigger fell vacant, the applicant used to call at the manse to lodge his application, and make any inquiry that he deemed necessary for his own satisfaction, or answer any question for the satisfaction of the minister. A simple-minded man, one not given to much forethought, apparently called on the Rev. Mr. Barty, of Ruthven, with reference to the situation of gravedigger, for which he wished to apply. Matters having been talked over and almost everything mutually settled, the candidate raised a curious point—"Am I to get onything like steady wark?" he gravely asked.

"Steady wark!" replied the minister in astonishment. "Keep's a', Peter, ye'd bury the parish in a fortnicht!"

It was generally considered a great lift in the social scale for the country gravedigger when he was appointed beadle, and held the combined offices. In the churchyard scene in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, Johnny Mortsheugh demonstrates that he is now a person of considerable importance in the parish since he received promotion. Addressing the crowd with reference to the evil prognostications of old Ailsie Gourlay, Johnny proceeds, "I take ye a' to witness, gude people, that she threatens me wi' mischief, and forespeaks me. If onything but gude happens to me . . . this night, I'll made it the blackest night's job she ever stirred in. I'll hae her before Presbytery and

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Synod. *I'm half a minister mysell now that I am a bedral."*

In his dual capacity of beadle and gravedigger the minister's man reveals himself in various moods and aspects—grave and gay, reflective, silent, communicative, sarcastic, grasping, independent. The plurality of offices sometimes marred him and sometimes made him. He was only human, and as such comes under the public eye with "all his imperfections on his head." For that very reason, however, he claims respect and sympathy.

Under some exceptional circumstances a farmer had buried his wife. When he came to learn the burial charges he fell foul of the gravedigger, and refused to pay them, on the ground that they were "exorbitant, extortionate, and extravagant." Listening quietly to all the farmer's gathering wrath, the old man simply advanced this conclusive argument—"Down with the siller or up she comes!"

A more serious dispute than this occurred in connection with a funeral in Banffshire, where the beadle went over the score altogether in the matter of churchyard fees. So exorbitant were these declared to be that a relative of the deceased went to the minister and lodged a complaint. Minister and man had it out between them. "Whatever could you mean, Tammas, by making such an unheard-of charge?"

After considerable unwillingness to come to the point, Tammas at last explained, "Ye see, sir, the way was this—When the corp an' me were young men, he cheated me out o' thirty shillings i' the trock (ex-

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change) o' a watch. Here was my last chance, thinks I; for if I didna get it aff him noo, I wouldna hae gotten it at a'."

On an opposite tack altogether we find Alexander Martin of Jedburgh. Money matters did not seem to trouble him at all, for in thanking some cronies who had helped him home from a carousal at the Black Bull one night he declared that he "would bury them a' for naething some day."

The nature of the gravedigger's work is such that it suggests, or ought to suggest, matter for sober and profitable reflection. Under this impression a minister one day, in passing through the churchyard of his parish, found the old beadle at work.

"Well, Saunders," said he, "this employment of yours is well calculated to make an old man like you thoughtful. It speaks like a loud voice, and calls upon you to turn from your evil ways while yet there is time."

The old man, resting himself on his spade, and taking a pinch of snuff the while, replied, "I thocht, sir, ye kenned there's nae repentance in the grave."

The "evil ways" here referred to by the minister were no doubt the drinking habits of a former day. Many a lecture the old beadle used to get on this failing, but he was generally able to hold his own and find a way out of the difficulty. A medical man once tried his hand at advice on a village beadle, and latterly threatened to report his case to the kirk-session when there seemed no amendment. "Man, doctor," replied the incorrigible, "I hae covered up mony

## THE MINISTER'S MAN AS SEXTON

a bit fau't o' yours. I think ye micht look owre yin o' mine."

A stranger, seeing an old man interested in a skull which he had just turned up, asked whose it had been once upon a time. "Man," replied the gravedigger, "that belanged to the great Dr. ——. Weel kenned was he for a queer fallow. He could drink glass for glass at a big dinner till a' were below the table but himsel'. Then he would ca' the servants into anither room, an' gie tham an address as gude as if he was in the pu'pit an' hadna had a drap!"

The pitcher that goes often to the fountain gets broken at last, and the old gravedigger's time comes when he, too, has to submit to the universal decree, and suffer his successor to do for him what he had so often done for others. The minister of Ancrum was once sent for to come and see the old beadle and gravedigger who had served the parish long and faithfully.

Sandy was in bed—uneasy, restless, and tossing about in an unhappy kind of way. "Anything troubling you, Sandy? Anything on your mind?"

"Naething that ye can help me wi', Mr. Cawmill."

"You don't know that. Let me know what is troubling you, and it's very likely I may be able to say or suggest something that will relieve you."

"Nae use, Mr. Cawmill. It's about by wi' me, an' I maun submit."

"But, Sandy, you haven't told me your trouble yet. I ask you while yet there is opportunity."

"Weel, Mr. Cawmill, it's just this. Ye see it's five-and-thirty year syne I began the gravediggin' in this

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parish, an' in that time I've pit below the grun' three hunder an' ninety-six. If I could be spared to make out the six hunder I could gae way in peace an' contentment."

A singular wish with which to close a long career. Here is a still more singular fancy in the head of an old beadle.

Many years ago there used to be seen every day sitting on the churchyard wall that surrounds the Abbey grounds at Hexham an old man with a long white beard. Asked one day why he continued to sit so regularly in the same spot, he explained—"I used to be betherel o' the auld Abbey here; but I got so frail I had to gie the gravediggin' up twa year syne. However, I keepit to mysel' the richt to bury twae men about as auld's mysel', and that hae bathered me a' my life, an' it's for their pleasure I come here every day *juist to let them see I'm waitin' on them.*"

There is another little matter worth a passing notice, since it illustrates another phase of the beadle's humour. Some years ago, when the custom of serving cake and wine at funerals was generally observed in Glasgow and the West of Scotland, the beadles of the city churches were usually hired for the purpose of attending to the refreshments. At a funeral in the rural part of the parish of Govan, the minister, the late Dr. Leishman, conducted the devotional service. After handing round cake and wine to the company, the presiding beadle stepped forward and desired the minister to return thanks, as was the custom. But as he passed out he was heard to say, "Be as

## THE MAN'S MINISTER AS A DRINKER

driech as ye can, Doctor, for we hae a' the glasses to pack afore we lift."

Any sketch of the minister's man or beadle of a former day would be incomplete without some allusion to the auld drinking times in Scotland, and the way in which he was affected by these times. The late Baron Clerk Rattray, as quoted by Dean Ramsay, states that in his younger days he had hardly ever known "a perfectly sober betheral." This seems hard on the beadle; but there are extenuating circumstances, and it is only fair that they should be stated. The minister himself was not always an example to his man, in the popular and moral acceptation of the term; and if the latter did follow the example now and again, we can scarcely wonder at his indiscretion. The times are changed now from what they were at the close of last and the beginning of the present century. The usages of society were then so totally different that it is easier to *contrast* than compare them with present-day manners.

The late Dr. W. Lindsay Alexander, as his biographer tells us, could recall hearing, when a child, one of the servants at Pinkieburn discoursing volubly on the gifts and graces of her former minister, the celebrated Dr. Carlyle, of Inveresk. She would tell of his dining at Pinkieburn, and following him with admiring gaze as he left the house on his homeward path. "There he gaed, decent man, as steady as a wall, after his ain share o' five bottles o' port."

Not quite so steady under similar circumstances was the minister of Glenisla, the Rev. Mr. Watt, who,

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one Saturday afternoon, called at the hospitable farmhouse of Formel, and had a few tumblers of toddy with his friend the farmer. Starting for home, Mr. Watt found himself so unable to preserve his equilibrium on the back of his pony, that the farmer's son George volunteered to walk beside him and keep the minister's balance true.

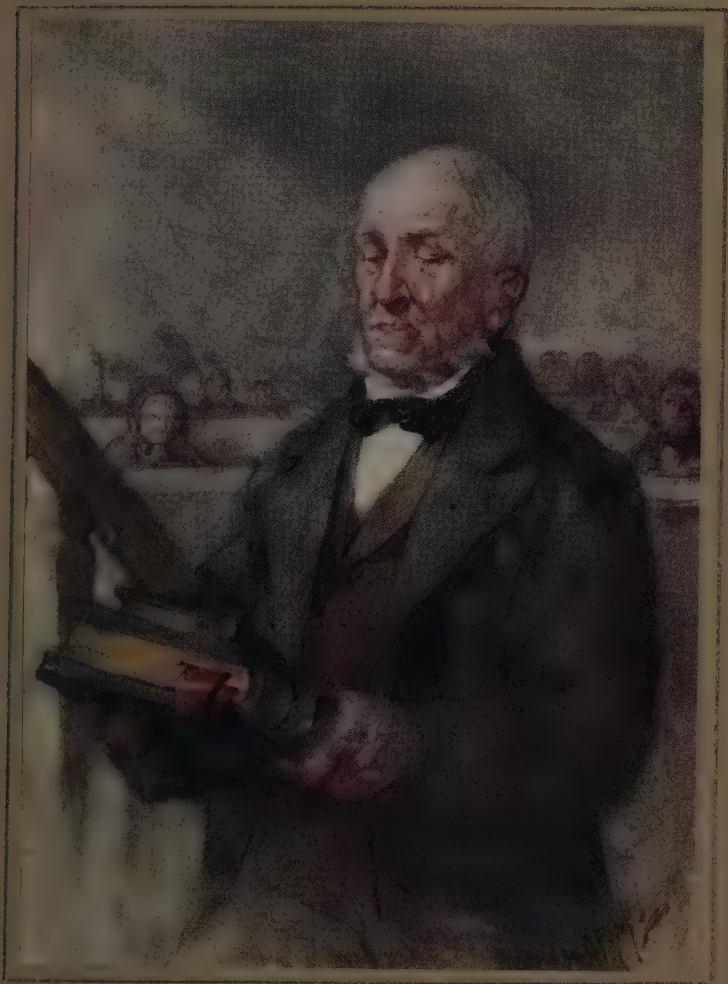
On arriving at the manse, a good five-mile walk from the farmhouse, Mr. Watt excused himself for not asking George to go in. "Georgie, my man," said the minister, "I maun get in, ye see, for I've the morn's thrashin' afore me"—referring in farmer's language to the preparation for his work in church on the morrow.

Curious to see how Mr. Watt got through his work next day, George went to church, and was astonished to find him, as fresh as paint, giving out as his text, "Be not drunk with wine," and declaiming in eloquent terms against the evils of intemperance, and the misery it entails on the individual, the family, and society generally.

Still more unsteady was Mr. Campbell, the minister of Lilliesleaf, who didn't even reach the manse on one occasion, having fallen asleep on the way home. In the morning he was seen by one of his parishioners, who stood before him and said, in a serious tone, "Eh, Mr. Cawmill, waes me, is that you?" Looking up, the minister promptly replied, "Whisht, woman—it's for a wager." Whereupon he rose, resumed his journey, and reached the manse in time for breakfast. If the minister was not proof against the attractions







THE BEADLE

By H. C. Preston Macgoun, R.S.W.



## THE MINISTER'S MAN AS A DRINKER

of conviviality neither was the elder altogether infallible. One day (relates Mr. W. Harvey, in *Scottish Life and Character in Anecdote and Story*) a minister, on going home from a meeting, met one of his elders "very fou." "Dear me, John," he exclaimed, "how did you get into this state?" "Oh, minister," replied John, "it's a' due to thae Communion Cards." "What!" cried the minister; "you don't mean to say you have been delivering your cards in that state?" "Oh no," said John; "but the folks were a' that kind in offering me a drop that I was dune for afore I kent where I was." "But surely everyone did not offer you drink?" continued the preacher. "Are there no teetotallers in your district?" "Oh ay," answered the elder, "plenty of them; but I aye send theirs by post!"

The late Rev. Mr. Pringle, of Pollokshaws, was a clergyman of mild but firm manners, in dealing with members of his congregation. One of these was much addicted to dram-drinking, and, though seldom going great lengths in public, went so far as to become an object of serious advice, remonstrance, reproof, and threat; all of which had been tried in turn, and for a time had their effect. Exclusion, at last, from the privileges of the Church was threatened, if another instance of indulgence was proven against him, and the defaulter promised implicit obedience in future, and did keep his promises for some time, which gladdened the benevolent heart of Mr. Pringle, hoping that he had been the means of reclaiming the unfortunate man from vicious indulgence, and restoring his usefulness to his family. One day Mr. Pringle was com-

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ing through the main street of the village, when whom should he see exhibiting unequivocal symptoms of intoxication, but his irreclaimable member, describing his course at regular angles, and making towards him, as rapidly as the frequent adjustment of the centre of gravity permitted. The offender noticed his minister, who could not be avoided, and made a lurch, somewhat lengthening the limb of the angle, into a recess. Then putting his back against the wall till Mr. Pringle came up, he quoted, with emphasis, standard authority as an apology for his failing, "No mere man since the Fall, is able perfectly to keep the commandments, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed."

Deacon M——, of Dumbarton, was in the habit of sacrificing very freely to the jolly god. One forenoon, being "Bacchi plenus," he accidentally thrust his elbow through the minister's window. The clergyman came out instantly and lectured him on the sin and folly of his conduct, and the ruin of health and character that would follow his perseverance in it. "Ay, ay," said the deacon, "that's a' very fine—my plan is to pit by a' my drinkin' when I'm young and strong, and no' to be seen gaun stottin' about aye half fu' when my head's as white as the snaw."

In former days a Mr. Graham was session-clerk and parochial teacher of ——, and although he faithfully and ably discharged all the duties of his double office, still he occasionally fell into the sin of drinking a little too much. His spouse, as a matter of course, was sorry to witness this failing of her guidman, and often remonstrated with him on the impropriety of his con-

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duct. But the husband turned the point of her rebuke, by simply exclaiming, " True, I put mysel' whiles aff the perpendicular, an' it takes a wee to bring me to the plum again ; but do you no ken, my dear, that if it hadna been for that bit fau't ye ne'er wad hae been Mrs. Graham ? "

If the minister and elder came through such experiences, is it to be wondered at if the man thought there was little, if any, harm done if he went and did likewise ? Of all men in the community in his day and generation, there were, perhaps, few more exposed to the temptation of taking a dram, or being invited to take one, than the minister's man. So much, so frequently, was he before the public that there seemed no incident in the exercise of his profession in which the temptation did not touch him. Births, baptisms, marriages, funerals, messages, intimations—all carried their glass of whisky for the beadle ; and as he was only a man he consequently very often fell. It seems astonishing how easily he recovered from his fall, and had always such an answer ready as made those who desired to sit in judgment on him come off only second best. At any rate, those who could not throw the first stone at him generally did come off second best.

" You have been drinking again, John," said a minister to his man. " I really think it's time you were giving it up now."

" Ay, it's a' that, sir. But do you never take a bit dram yoursel' ? "

" I do, but you must recollect the difference between my circumstances and yours, John."

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"Very true, sir; but do ye ken how it was that the streets o' Jerusalem in the auld days were aye kept sae clean?"

The minister had to confess that he was ignorant on that point in Sacred History. "Weel, I'll tell ye," observed John. "It was jist because everybody keep it his ain door-stane clean." The minister concluded that it would be wise to say nothing more on the subject.

Another John had this advice given him while under the influence of the "Barley-bree"—"Never to drink except you're dry." The answer was, "That's exackly what I'm aye doin', for I'm never slocken'd."

The only shortcoming that was laid to the charge of Donald, a worthy and useful beadle in one of the Dundee churches, was that of being too fond of a dram. From being fond of it, he got to be fonder, until the minister had to remonstrate with him on the subject.

With a look of offended dignity, Donald replied, "Mair than what's guid for me I never take, sir. Did you ever see me the waur o' drink?"

"Yes," replied the minister. "I saw you not very long ago clinging to a railing in the Nethergate, and that you might not know I saw you I crossed over to the opposite side of the street."

"There now, you did wrang," said Donald, drawing himself up to his full height, and assuming the look of injured innocence—"very far wrang! It was your duty to have stopped and admonished me on the spot!"

In the following anecdote the minister had his "inn-

## THE MINISTER'S MAN AS A DRINKER

ings" for once, and John came off only second best in his reply to the observation that whisky was his greatest enemy. "But we are tell't to love our enemies." "Yes, John," responded the minister; "but it is not said we are to swallow them."

Round the parish in districts, villages, hamlets, and farms the beadle was sent at intervals to intimate that the minister would visit the families on a given date. In nine cases out of ten—indeed, we may freely say in ten cases out of ten—the bottle was produced by the gudewife, who welcomed the man for the sake of the minister, and invited him to "Sit down an' rest ye." Was he the man to resist such an invitation? No doubt there were those who could say as the bottle was set down, "No, thank ye, mem; I've dune brawly at that as I came alang, an' I maun say NO NOO." But one does not come across many such in the literature pertaining to beadles.

Completing his round of calls and intimations, one beadle returned to the manse very much in the same state as Dr. Carlyle, or Mr. Watt, or Mr. Campbell may have done. With considerable uneasiness the beadle found his way to the study and got over the trial of facing the minister as soon as possible.

"The waur o' drink again!" exclaimed the latter, as the victim of parochial hospitality "steitered" into the study and sat down on the first chair that was handy. "Drunk again!"

"Dinna mention't, Mr. Robinson," was the reply; "I'm near about by wi't mysel'."

"I'm surprised to see ye in that state," observed an-

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other minister in exactly similar circumstances. "I can go through the length and breadth of the parish and return home not a hair the worse. People don't offer me spirits when I'm visiting."

"Weel, sir," was the reply, "I canna preceesely explain that, excep' on the supposeeshun that I'm a wee bit mair pop'lar in the parish than you."

Just as ready with his answer was the beadle in the session-house on one occasion. "I much fear, John," said a country minister while the two were alone, and before any of the elders had come in—"I much fear that the bottle has become——"

"Ay, sir," interrupted the man, "I was just gaun to observe that there's a strongsmello' drink amang's."

The village barber also on one occasion had the better of the minister, who had reproved him for his drinking habits. A few days after administering the reproof the minister went into the barber's shop and submitted himself to be shaved. But the hand of the tonsorial artist was so shaky that the minister's face suffered severely. At length, after a deeper gash than ever, the minister cried out—

"John, John, it's an awful thing this drink."

"'Deed ay, sir," was the calm response, "it makes the skin gey an' tender."

As we come to the closing scenes in the life and experience of the old Scottish beadle, we find much that tells of devotion to duty, and to his master.

One of the most touching incidents in Dr. Norman Macleod's *Reminiscences of a Highland Parish* is the death of Old Rory, the minister's man, not long after

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that of his master. This story of love and devotion recalls another, telling of the last days of Mr. Gentle and old John Gowdie.

An affecting incident occurred one Sunday morning in the parish church of St. John's. Mr. Gentle, having been asked, by special request, to re-deliver his famous sermon on "The Great Majority," was proceeding with the discourse when he was alarmed by a commotion in the minister's pew, as if some one had fainted. Then followed a piercing cry, more of mental agony, it seemed, than of physical suffering—a cry, from whatever cause it came, so piercing as to bring the service to an abrupt conclusion.

Leaving the pulpit, Mr. Gentle hurried down the stair, and was still more alarmed to find that the commotion was caused by the sudden illness of his wife, who was lying pale as death, and apparently quite unconscious, in the arms of one of the servants from the manse.

Carried to the vestry by the help of John Gowdie and others, Mrs. Gentle gradually recovered consciousness, and stated that she felt well enough to walk home. Home, however, she only reached to fall into one fainting turn after another until the gentle soul departed. That night the manse of St. John's was rendered desolate; the children who were born there had all died in infancy, and now their mother had gone to join them in "the great majority."

After this sore bereavement Mr. Gentle was never again the same blithe and cheery man and minister he had formerly been. The desolation that reigned

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in the manse seemed to appal him. He became greatly changed—looked an old man all at once, and fell into low, desponding moods as if life for him had lost its spring and motive. “He’s no’ himsel’ at a’,” mourned and crooned John Gowdie to his wife. “The minister’s gaun a’ to pieces”—speaking of his master as if he had been a piece of clockwork.

“John,” said Mr. Gentle one day, “wasn’t it Thursday evening first that you arranged for us to visit and catechise at Whistlefield?”

“Yes, Mr. Gentle, it was just Thursday first.”

“All right,” replied the minister, but in a tone which seemed to drop all the prospective enjoyment out of a visit that used to be one of the brightest in the whole range of his pastoral duties.

Thursday night came—a gloomy night in November. Minister and man started for Whistlefield in the gig, and arrived all safely at the hospitable farmhouse, where they received a warm welcome.

At ten o’clock Mr. Gentle and his man set out for home. The night was pitch dark. The rain fell in heavy showers. “Take *you* the reins, John,” said Mr. Gentle, “and give the mare her head. Mirk or moonlight’s all the same to Maggie Lauder.”

Away the grey mare went into the night—in darkness so profound that the light from the gig lamps only showed her flanks and the tips of her ears. These last she kept twitching nervously forward as if feeling her way by sound alone. But on she went in her unerring knowledge of the country, and without the slightest “shy” or stumble in the frightful darkness.

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John Gowdie entertained his master all the way down with stories about the grey mare and her splendid qualities of endurance, speed, sagacity, and good temper. She never slackened speed till she reached the toll-bar at the end of the bridge across the river. The toll-keeper came out of his cottage with a lantern, and while opening the gate he recognised the minister's mare and called out, "A' richt, Mr. Gentle. I hope ye'll be nane the waur o' bein' out in sic an awfu' nicht as this."

Mr. Gentle did not speak, but John answered for him, "Thank ye kindly, Henry. Mr. Gentle's sae weel rowed up to keep out the cauld that he mauna speak."

Crossing the bridge and walking up the steep bank on the opposite side, the mare in a few minutes reached the summit. Away she rattled down to St. John's, and reached the village just as the church clock struck eleven.

The minister's housekeeper and the beadle's wife were standing, one of them holding a lighted lantern, on the steps of the front door at the manse as the party drove up. Benumbed and stiffened, it was with some difficulty that John "climbed down" from his seat, but he got down at last. Then turning to his master he said, "A' safe, Mr. Gentle. Take time, na, an' I'll help ye doon."

But the minister sat still, and made no effort to rise. What was more singular, he did not even speak. Asking the lantern from his wife, John threw the light on his master's face. The ample folds of a thick woollen "Comforter" concealed everything but the eyes, and

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these were set, fixed, looking past everything, and staring into vacancy !

The minister of St. John's was dead ! He himself had gone over to "the great majority."

After the shock produced by such a discovery at the manse door, after all the excitement consequent upon the funeral, the funeral services in the church, and the expression of general grief and lamentation throughout the parish, John Gowdie felt like one who had received a stupefying, crushing blow. He took to bed, and never again rose from it. He still shuddered, as if chilled to the bones, while he thought of the drive down the dark valley with the dead minister by his side. The wealthiest—and, be it said, the kindest—heritor of St. John's called one day to see the invalid. He found him troubled about only one thing, and that was, "What is to become o' Katie?"

"I'll see to Katie being provided for," replied the wealthy landowner. "Dismiss all your fears about her."

"God bless ye for that ! It sets me free from everything here noo."

Within two days after receiving this assurance, the faithful servant followed his master. The remains of the two were laid to rest not far from each other in St. John's Kirkyard, those of the minister below the eastern window of the church, and those of the minister's man in the shaded spot pointed out long before to Katie, when she was asked the first quaint and curious question of the courtship which resulted in a singularly happy married life.

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The foregoing stories show the beadle in a variety of moods and humours, compassed about with faults and failings, but yet possessed of many virtues and good qualities.

Any humour that may be going in the profession to-day is generally the product of some belated member who has brought with him the flavour and the atmosphere of bygone times.

Thus a clergyman in Greenock, having arranged to go to London, desired his church-officer to carry his bag down to the railway station. Hearing the minister ask for an insurance ticket, and seeing him get one, the man whispered confidentially, "Ye'd better leave the ticket wi' me, Doctor, as I've heard that in an accident there's aye somebody spared to take things off a corp."

There is a touch of bygone times, too, in the following anecdote. Coming out of church in Glasgow one Sunday morning, a gentleman observed to the old beadle that he had heard the minister's voice very imperfectly. "'Deed, sir," was the reply, "the agnostics in this kirk are very bad."

The beadle of former days was an all-round kind of man. For example, the beadle of Orphir, in the Synod of Orkney, is thus described by the minister in his account of the parish, published in *The Statistical Account* of 1797, "Jack of all trades! This last is the kirk-officer, who serves the parish in the different capacities of beadle, sexton, cooper, slater, plasterer, boat-hirer, gardener, helper, mason, quarryman, labourer, butcher, and farmer."

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

Useful as such a beadle must have been in the parish, he was yet only the representative of many more such "handy" men throughout Scotland. But there were higher types than these. There was, for example, Robert Walker, the worthy and respected beadle of the Great Hamilton Street Reformed Presbyterian Church, Glasgow, who was endowed not only with literary tastes but with literary gifts. To the *Scottish Presbyterian* for November 1838 he contributed a series of interesting and graphic articles, entitled, "Speerin' the Quaestions: a Sabbath Evening in the Year 1800." Robert also wrote "The Chronicles of the Congregation," a narrative, after the manner of the Old Testament history, describing an important movement in the congregation with which he was officially connected. The "Chronicle" was intended for private circulation only, but it was subsequently printed in the late Mr. John M. Robertson's history of *The Rise and Progress of the Renwick Free Church*.

There is even a romantic element in the history of the beadle, as related by a writer in *The Scotsman*, in an interesting article entitled "A Rural District and its Landlords a Century Ago."

Early in the eighteenth century a Dutch trading vessel was driven ashore on the coast of Forfarshire and became a total wreck. The crew were saved, and hospitably entertained by the villagers of Lunan—the captain becoming the guest of David Gavin, beadle of the parish. Remaining there for some weeks, the gallant captain fell in love with the beadle's daughter, married her, and eventually took her with him to

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Holland. Meantime the old beadle died, and was succeeded in office by his son David, who proved to be a steady, thrifty, and industrious man. Finding his professional income to be but a poor one, he eked it out by opening a grocer's shop in the village, prospered in business, married, and had a son, who afterwards went abroad to visit his relatives in Holland. There he settled, succeeded in business, amassed a great fortune, and with it returned to his native country, where he purchased the estate of Langton, and sought in marriage the hand of the daughter of the seventh Earl of Lauderdale. According to a traditionary report, when the Earl asked the aspirant what claim he had to the hand of his daughter, the man of money replied, "Ten thousand a year." The marriage eventually took place, and through it the son of a country beadle, and the grandson of a beadle, became the son-in-law of an earl, the father-in-law of a marquis, and the grandfather of a duchess.

With this romantic story, one may fittingly say farewell to The Auld Kirk Beadle—a man who faithfully served his day and generation. To beadle as well as minister came the time when, through increasing age and infirmity, it was necessary to resign his cherished duties, and when, with faltering step and tear-bedimmed eye, he, for the last time, carried the books to and from the pulpit. His feelings, deep as they must have been, have been admirably portrayed in Mr. Hamish Hendry's fine poem, "The Beadle's Lament," of which the following are the first and last verses:—

## THE AULD KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

Nae mair, auld Sabbath Book, nae mair  
Shall we twa tak' the poopit stair ;  
Aneth my arm wi' decent care  
    Ye've traivelled lang :  
But noo, like bauchles past repair,  
    We twa maun gang.

My day is dune ; and richt or wrang  
The thocht comes like a waefu' sang ;  
This Book and me, we've traivelled lang  
    The poopit stair ;  
But that's a gate, we twa shall gang  
    Nae mair, nae mair !

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE KIRK OF THE PRESENT DAY



## CHAPTER NINE THE KIRK OF THE PRESENT DAY

ALTHOUGH THE AULD KIRK HAS PASSED through many vicissitudes—Secessions, Disruptions, and the like—there is yet much life left in it. The tendency towards sectarianism is on the decline. The fathers and brethren have awakened to the fact that “Union is strength”; and that the differences separating the Auld Kirk, the U.P.’s, and the Free Kirk, instead of imparting vigour to religion served merely to give ground for the scoffing of the unregenerate. There is therefore now a strong desire for the reunion of the Presbyterian bodies, which desire has already borne fruit in the amalgamation of the United Presbyterian Church with the Free Church. At the present moment negotiations are on foot to bring about a union of the United Free Church with the Auld Kirk. Doubtless this will be accomplished. The interests of religion demand it.

But the Secessions from the Auld Kirk, serious as they were, did not fail to furnish a few glimpses of humour. The following story is an example of this:—

“Well, John,” said a laird to one of his tenants, “what’s your opinion about this voluntary business?”

“’Deed, sir, I’m a wee doubtfu’ about it. It seems to me that it’s the black coats themsel’s that are making a’ the stir. Us puir folk are no’ fashin’ ourselves muckle wi’ it.”

“You are quite right, John. It is certainly the ministers who are leading the movement.”

“Then, sir, ye may be sure the ministers hae a drift

## THE KIRK AND ITS WORTHIES

o' their ain tae drive. For my mother used to say to me—"Jock," said she, "whenever ye see a flock o' craws fleeing a' ae way, depend on't there's craws' business on hand."

In this deduction the worthy woman was doubtless correct. The secessions from the Church were, in some of the minor instances at least, the work of ministers suffering from supersensitive consciences. In some such cases breadth of view was conspicuously absent. But the effect was that sometimes members of the laity became hopelessly confused in their beliefs.

"What place of worship does James Dawson gang tae now? He's passing on the ither side of the road," said a worthy old member of the church to a companion who was journeying with him to the church.

"Really, man, I dinna ken," was the reply. "I fear he has nae kirk in his e'e. He yince belonged to the Burgher party. But when the question o' New Licht and Auld Licht views got in amang them, James' licht was blawn oot atween them."

In that matter one can sympathise with James. Among the leaders of the smaller secession movements there were a good many blind leaders of the blind. Small wonder then if the people were at times doubtful whom to follow. Probably this was the case with a man who encountered his minister one day, and was taken to task for not attending the kirk.

"I doubt you are growing remiss, John," said the minister. "I have not seen you in the church these last three Sabbaths."

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But John was not abashed.

“Na, na, meenister,” he replied. “It’s no’ that I’m growin’ remiss. I’m jist tinkerin’ awa’ wi’ ma soul masel’.”

The Disruption, when the Free Church was formed, shook the Auld Kirk to its foundations, but one minister exhibited some wit in the choice of a text on the Sunday following the epoch-making event. He preached from 2nd Samuel, 15th chapter and 11th verse—“And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; *and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing.*”

But in these modern and more reasonable days when Reunion, and not Disruption, is the watchword of the Church, it is perhaps unnecessary to dwell upon the days of Secessions. It may be as well to consider one or two features of the present-day Church, and among these the Sunday School.

This institution has various uses—some of them differing from the ideas which led to its foundation. The children of the congregation are supposed to go to the Sunday School for religious instruction, but it is open to doubt whether the attendance would be satisfactory if it were not for two reasons which have little to do with religion. The first is that the harassed mothers of the scholars are often glad to get the children off their hands for an hour or so, in order that they themselves may snatch a brief rest from maternal care. The second is the desire of the children to be eligible for the annual Sunday-School treat and annual soirée. The instruction given in the schools is

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probably beneficial to the children, and therefore the bribe of the annual treat and soirée may be considered justified. It happened in one country church that the time for the treat was at hand, and on the Sunday preceding the excursion the minister proceeded to give notice to the congregation of the arrangements. He did so as follows:—

“Ahem, my friends! The children will assemble next Saturday at the schoolhouse; and from there they will be conveyed in carts, kindly provided by members of the congregation, to Auchencreich Farm, where, when they have reached it, they will receive that which, when they get it, they will know what it is.” Possibly this announcement may have been intelligible to the older members of the congregation, but its involved style lends some support to the statement that “A minister is a man who is invisible six days of the week and incomprehensible on the seventh.”

The minister does not always teach in the Sunday School, but he occasionally examines the classes. It happened one day that a minister entered his Sunday School with a view to catechising the scholars. For awhile he stood gazing at the class in silence. He was a somewhat gloomy man, and the children were in awe of him. At length, fixing his eye upon one small girl, he thundered out—

“Who made your vile body?”

The little maid flushed to her ears.

“Please, sir,” she answered, “mother made the body, and auntie made the skirt. But they don’t quite meet.”

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This was the reply unexpected. Here is another instance of it.

At the conclusion of the regular lessons at a Sunday School the superintendent delivered a short address to the class. At the end of it he said—

“Now all you boys and girls who would like to go to heaven when you die, hold up your hands.”

Instantly every child had a hand in the air, except one little fellow sitting in the far corner, who in answer to the superintendent's question—

“Don't you want to go to heaven, Tommy?” replied, “No, sir. Not if that crowd's going.”

In many Sunday Schools the practice prevails of reading a chapter of the Bible, verse by verse, round the class. Some scholars who could not read well used to count ahead to see what verse would fall to their lot, so that they might have time to prepare for the ordeal of reading it aloud. Upon one occasion the reading was from the Book of Daniel, and one small boy made such a mess of the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that the teacher found it necessary to reprove him severely. Verse by verse the chapter went down the class, and presently began to come round for the second time. The small boy already mentioned began to look anxious, and finally burst into tears. “What's the matter,” whispered his companion. “Don't you see,” he answered. “Them three miserable cusses are coming to me again.”

The woes of the scholars were not confined to the ordeal of reading aloud. Sometimes they might be visited by a distinguished stranger, who would con-

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descend to put a few questions. The fewer they were, the better pleased were the children. A story is told of a very pompous Glasgow clergyman who had little of the humility of his Divine Master. He, it is said, visited a country Sunday School, and proceeded to catechise the children in his most lordly manner.

"Now, my young friends," he said, "who am I?"

There was a deep silence. The children felt that this imposing but dreadful presence in their midst must be something very important; but their little minds, overwhelmed with awe, could think of nothing appropriate or adequate, until a brilliant idea struck one small girl. Gazing earnestly at the dignified clergyman before her, she held up her hand and piped out—

"Please, sir, you're God."

The great man was not abashed. His answer was—

"Well, no, my dear. Not exactly—not exactly."

While speaking of children, it may be appropriate to refer to the subject of baptism. This is a solemn function in the Scottish churches, and the spectacle of the mother bringing in the baby to be baptized, and the father holding up his child to the minister for the performance of the rite, was always one which appealed to the feelings of the congregation. But it is interesting and curious to note the prevalence of drinking at the first religious ceremony and the last in which a Scotsman of bygone days was concerned. Most people are aware of the prevalence of drinking at funerals in olden times, and still to some extent in the Highlands. But it is perhaps less well known that

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baptisms were made the occasion of unseemly revelry. Thus one finds that in 1736 the Penpont Presbytery placed on record the fact that they deplored "the too great gatherings at some baptisms, too great preparations made for them, and too much drunk at them; and in some places there is a scandalous way of drinking in coming with the child to and from the place of administration, whereas at such a time not only parents should endeavour a religious frame of soul, but also any friends and neighbours that are invited upon such occasions to be witnesses to the dedication should be devout." Matters in this respect are now greatly improved, and baptisms are carried out decently and with reverence; but many parents shirk the public appearance, and have their children baptized in their own homes.

This custom for a long time was regarded with disfavour, as is instanced by a letter from the Rev. Robert Woodrow to his wife, written in 1718, in which he says: "There is a scandalous compliance with a custom, which has come down to us from the South, of baptizing the infants of most people in their houses, and winked at lest the gentry become Episcopalians." But despite all Mr. Woodrow and other like-minded men said, ministers in time found themselves obliged to yield to the wishes of parents, who, however, were made to pay fines which were put into the Poor Box.

It is the duty of the minister to ascertain before baptism the religious beliefs of the parents, to impress upon them their responsibilities in the matter of the upbringing of the child, and generally to see that they

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comprehend the seriousness of the sacrament of baptism. The following story illustrates this:—

The duty of church-going is by no means so strictly observed in Glasgow as it used to be. The Glasgow working man, after a strenuous week of toil, and perhaps also a somewhat sultry Saturday night, is disposed to keep his bed on a Sunday morning. It thus comes about that many working men are not members of any church. In the case of one such man, his wife had recently presented him with a son and heir; and being a woman of good upbringing she was desirous that the child should be duly baptized. But the husband shirked the business. He was not a member of any church, and he knew that baptism required the services of a minister. But at last, yielding to the importunity of his wife, he went forth to seek ministerial aid. After much anxious thought he approached the nearest manse, and in due course found himself telling his errand to the minister. The latter looked solemn when he heard that his visitor was not a member of any church.

“My friend,” he said, “this is a serious matter. The ordinance of baptism is a sacred and solemn function: and before I can baptize your child I must examine you a little as to your religious beliefs, in order to ascertain that you clearly understand the responsibilities of your position. Now I shall just ask you a few simple questions. For example, you are doubtless acquainted with the beautiful and touching story of the creation of the world, and of mankind. Do you believe that story?”

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The man scratched his head.

"Ay," he said at length. "I think I can thole that yin."

The minister looked doubtful, but proceeded.

"Then there is that marvellous deliverance of the Prophet Jonah by the interposition of the whale. May I ask if you believe that story?"

The visitor cogitated for a minute.

"Ay," he said, "I'll thole that yin tae."

Once more the minister hesitated. Then he proceeded.

"Now," he said, "let us consider the sublime, the wonderful story of the three children of Israel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego passing unscathed through the burning fiery furnace. Do you believe that story?"

"Na, na, meenister," was the sharp reply, "I'm a furnaceman masel'."

This unsatisfactory answer brought the examination to an abrupt conclusion, and the visitor left the room. But in a few moments there was a tap at the door, and the furnaceman's head appeared round it.

"Meenister," he said, "I jist lookit back tae say I dinna believe thae ither d—d stories o' yours either."

The following two stories also show that humour is attendant even upon the Sacrament of Baptism:—

"Mem," said a servant, dressing up the fireplace on a Sunday afternoon, "we had a young man eighteen years of age baptized in our church this afternoon." "Ay, had you, Jenny? That would be a very interesting sight to you; we had a young girl fifteen

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years of age, lately in our church also ; but these might be very worthy persons, Jenny, although they had not been baptized when young—possibly their parents were Baptists.” “ Ah, na, mem,” replied Jenny, “ the young man couldna be that, for our minister said he was an adult.”

A well-known Scottish architect was travelling in Palestine recently, when news reached him of an addition to his family circle. The happy father immediately provided himself with some water from the Jordan to carry home for the christening of the infant, and returned to Scotland.

On the Sunday appointed for the ceremony he duly presented himself at the church, and sought out the beadle in order to hand over the precious water to his care. He pulled the flask from his pocket, but the beadle held up a warning hand, and came nearer to whisper—

“ No the noo, sir ; no the noo ! Maybe after the kirk’s oot ! ”

Apropos of baptisms, some parents show little discrimination in the names which they bestow upon their children. The fact that a boy’s father has been absurdly named is no good reason for rendering a young life miserable by sending a lad into the world with a name which excites derision. A gentleman once saw a small boy being interfered with by a number of older boys who were manifestly tormenting him about something. Having dispersed the tormentors, the gentleman asked the boy what was the matter. The lad hesitated, and then said diffidently—

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"Please, sir, they were teasing me about my name."

"About your name! Why, what is your name?"

"Please, sir, Belteshazzar."

"Belteshazzar! Who gave you that name?"

"Please, sir, I don't know. But if I find out when I get my growth on me it'll be a bad thing for him."

The first thing the Church does for a man is to baptize him. The last thing it does for him is to bury him. Funerals are naturally not subjects for mirth, but even on these melancholy occasions humorous incidents arise.

The funerals in the eighteenth century and for some time later were the excuse for a carouse, and the Presbytery of Penpont in 1726 appear to have been as much perturbed about the conduct of the people at funerals as at baptisms. The following is an extract from the Penpont Presbytery Records: "Yet further how unaccountable and scandalous are the large gatherings and unbecoming behaviour at burials and lakewacks, also in some places how many are grossly unmannerly in coming to burials without invitation. How extravagant are many in their preparations for such occasions, and in giving much drink, and driving it too frequently before and after the corpse is interred, and keeping the company too long together; how many scandalously drink, untill they be drunk on such occasions; this practice cannot but be hurtful, therefore ought to be discouraged and reformed, and people that are not ashamed to be so vilely unmannerly as to thrust themselves into such meetings without being called ought to be affronted."

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As the custom of holding high revelry after a funeral has now fallen into disuse, it is hardly necessary to dwell further upon it here, but one or two humorous incidents of an unexpected nature may be recorded.

On one occasion a parish minister was to officiate at a funeral, but at the last moment he found himself prostrated by illness, and therefore he sent for his precentor, who was also an elder, and asked him to take the funeral service. This worthy man undertook the duty, and opened the service with the 23rd Psalm.

"Friends," he said, "we'll sing this psalm tae the tune 'Wiltshire.' It was a great favourite wi' the remains."

A somewhat similar story is related of the funeral of a rich farmer, to which a quartette from the village choir was asked to go to lead the praise. After the burial the members of the quartette climbed into the carriage which had brought them, and prepared to start for home. A distant relative of the deceased hurried up to them.

"You gentlemen mustn't think of leaving yet," she said.

"Indeed. Why not?" asked the baritone.

"Because you're all expected for dinner over at the bereft's."

Funerals constitute a gloomy subject of discourse, so one more story regarding them must suffice. At a funeral in Glasgow the clergyman who was expected to lead the devotions of those assembled on the

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melancholy occasion did not come forward. The beadle therefore called out the name of an elder whom he knew to be in the room. That worthy man, not being accustomed to such exercises outside of his own family circle, with great presence of mind snatched his hat, saying, "I wonder wha can be wantin' me?" and quickly vanished, to the astonishment of the company.

Much is said and written nowadays on the subject of Sabbath desecration, and the gradually loosening grip of the Church upon the people. In England, Sabbath observance in the old sense is practically at an end. In Scotland, Sunday golf has made its appearance, and will doubtless be followed by further innovations. Some men do their golfing openly. Others have still a feeling that they are doing something of which they ought to be ashamed, and their proceedings are more or less furtive. It is said that a minister called recently upon one of his parishioners, and was informed by the absent man's son that he was at the golf club. The minister looked his disapproval, whereupon the youth added, "He's not gone to play golf, you know, not on a Sunday; only to drink beer and have a game at cards."

There is no record of the minister's reply.

In these days of great emigration to the colonies it is natural to suppose that the Auld Kirk is well to the fore in our over-seas Empire. Wherever the Scotsman goes he carries his religious convictions with him; and where two or three are gathered together they are pretty certain to have a church of sorts. In large

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communities it is a kirk, all complete. In smaller places there is a meeting-house. In remote regions the faithful meet in one another's houses. Sometimes there are open-air meetings, and to them people will flock from far and wide to hear the gospel preached as of old. The doctrines are simple, and the proceedings virile. The service, in the absence of any ordained minister, is conducted by an inspired brother. From *The Scotsman in Canada* one learns that in one of the early settlements the men took turns in conducting the Sabbath services. In course of time it came to the turn of Lachlan M'Gillivray, who had been a lumberman. He took as his topic the story of David and Goliath. Warming to his subject, he rose in excitement to a grand climax. "The stone from wee David's sling was guided tae the heid o' the giant, and the stone pierced his brain, and he fell. David rushed up—and—and tore his sword from its scabbard, whirled it roond and roond, and cut off his d——d head." Big Lachlan was not again invited to conduct the service.

A prominent Canadian divine had been preaching on some special occasion, and after the service he had a few friends to dinner. The minister's small boy was present, and one of the guests asked what he thought of his father's sermon.

"I guess it was very good," said the lad. "But there were three mighty fine places where he could have stopped."

Many Scots boys have had similar views upon sermons, paternal and otherwise, but it is usually indiscreet to air them.

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The following proof of the virility of religion in Australia is afforded by *The Sydney Bulletin*.

At a recent boxing bout at Longreach, the Rev. Hulton Sams acted as referee, Father Lane officiated as timekeeper, and the Rev. C. Hicks as ten seconds check. When the Rev. Sams gave his decision for a draw some of the audience boo-hooed, and thereferee invited any who disagreed to step into the ring with him. No one complied.

A time there was when the Church would snort and Methody  
leaders sniff

At them who step in the fistic ring and follow the sinful biff.  
But *now* the cleric will don the gloves and offer a churchly  
cheek

To them who smite with a fist of might, and bash on a foe-  
man's beak.

“Step into the ring with me.

Just put on the gloves,” says he.

“And the Church will biff till the Flesh is stiff,” says the  
reverend referee.

The only comment which it is advisable to offer upon the foregoing incident is that we live in an age of progress, and evidently the motto, “Advance Australia,” is significant of much.

Yet it is gratifying to find virile religion in the Colonies at a time when ministers at home are deploring the falling off in Church attendance. The habits of youth die hard, and Scots emigrants brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” are oftentimes greatly comforted in a foreign land by the sound of an auld Scots psalm, or by a good Scots sermon. The lethargy at home is a serious matter; but it is open

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to question whether the laity are altogether to blame. The clergy are not the force they once were. Sermons in the old days had a direct and personal application. Now as often as not one hears an essay, usually badly read, about nothing in which the hearer is even remotely interested. In the words of a West of Scotland poet \*—

Oh ! for the days when sinners shook  
Aneth the true Herd's righteous crook ;  
When men were telt that this auld Book  
Is God's ain word ;  
When texts were stanes waled frae the brook,  
And prayer a sword.

Four ministers I've seen ta'en ower  
To yon kirkyaird ; and a' the four  
Were men o' prayer, were men o' power,  
In kirk and session ;  
Preachers wha nailed ye wi' a glower  
To your transgression.

Oh ! for sic men o' godly zeal ;  
Men wha could grab ye, head and heel,  
And slype ye to the Muckle Deil,  
Withoot a qualm ;  
The sinner through the reek nicht squeal,—  
They sang a psalm !

These verses are an admirable summing up of the secret of the power of the Auld Kirk ministers. They were indeed "men o' godly zeal," who called a spade a spade in dealing with their folk. In these modern days men do not appreciate plain speaking about their own misdeeds, and the Church has no longer the civil

\* Hamish Hendry in "The Beadle's Lament."

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power at its back. To quote once more the same poet \*—

Nae mair frae pu'pits yerks a yell  
O' God's damnation fierce an' fell ;  
A saft an' couthie tale they tell,  
An' tell it quick ;  
They've sell't the guid auld brunstane Hell,  
An' pensioned Nick !

The moral apparently is that the root of the religious feeling in man is fear ; and that with the mellowing of the doctrines of the Church, or at least of the pulpit presentation of them, the influence of the Church has waned. This may be true. But one may yet hope that with the Union of the United Free and Established Churches a new wave of religious enthusiasm shall sweep over the land, filling our pulpits with "men o' prayer" and "men o' power." Scotsmen the world o'er cherish in their inmost hearts a deep and abiding affection for the Auld Country and the Auld Kirk ; and news of a union of all the Kirks would be glad tidings of great joy to many of Auld Scotland's sons in the uttermost parts of the earth. Gladsome would be the day to the Colonial when, setting foot in his native land, he could once more hear the glorious strains of "St. George's Edinburgh," follow a reverent prayer, and listen to a guid-gangin' Scots sermon. Then without fear of interference from elders or deacons, he might seek his old boyhood's haunts, even on the Sabbath day, and with overflowing heart repeat to himself those thrilling lines †—

\* Hamish Hendry in "Burns from Heaven."

† *Ibid.*

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An' when I stap oot ower the cluds,—  
There's Scotland yet ! The birlin' fluds ;  
The broomy braes ; the whusslin' wuds ;  
Gowans the same !  
God ! but my heart starts aff in thuds,  
To ken I'm hame.

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